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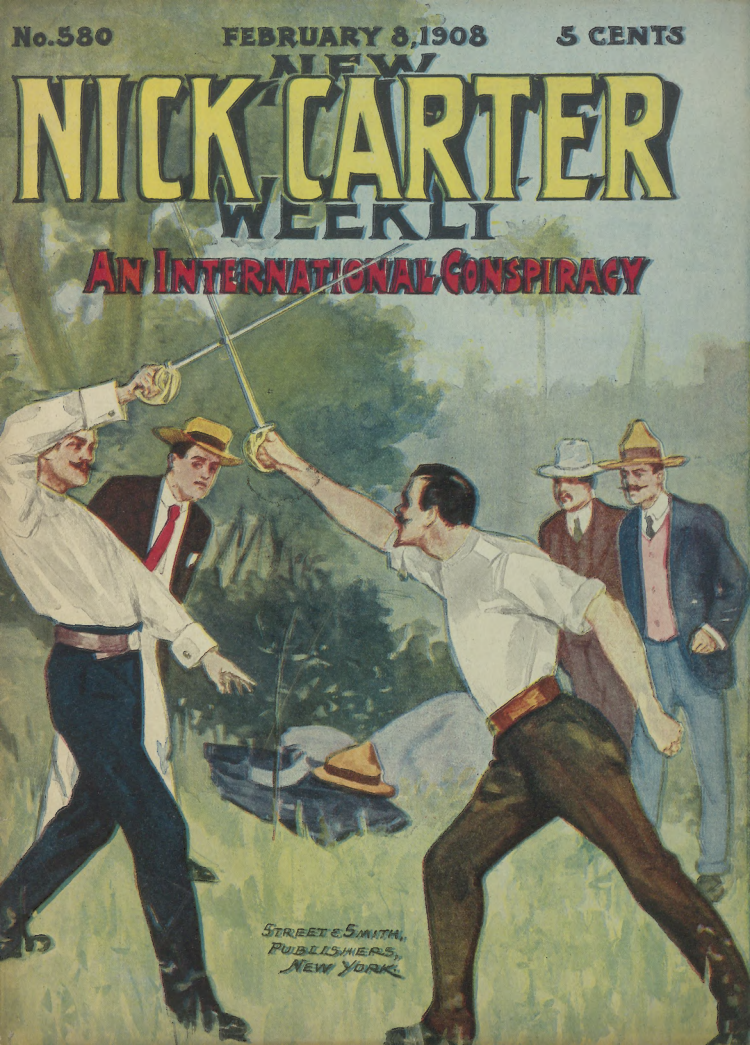
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

AN INTERNATIONAL CONSPIRACY



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NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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An International Conspiracy;

OR,

Nick Carter's Second Assistant in a New Field.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

PATSY'S DAY OF TROUBLE.

Patsy was cross; more than that, he was sullen. Down deep in his heart he was angry, and the remarkable thing about it was that he was angry at his chief, Nick Carter.

He could not remember a time in all his career when he had been angry at Nick Carter until that day—and perhaps, if his feelings could have been analyzed, it would have been discovered that he was more hurt than angry.

But the consequence was about the same.

He felt the injustice of what had been said to him. He did not think he deserved it. He had done what he considered to be the best—and he still believed that he was right, notwithstanding the "calling down" he had just received.

It was true that he had rather taken things into his own hands without consulting his chief, and that on a matter of grave importance, but if he was not to have discretionary powers in his work, of what use was it to work at all? At least, that is the question he was asking himself.

The facts, very briefly, were these:

A society man, formerly a friend of Nick Carter's named Billy Studley, had robbed a certain trust company in the city of New York of several hundred thousand dollars, and he had gotten away with the "goods." Under the name of Jasper Ryan he had committed other breaches of the law; he had nearly killed two policemen in making his escape from custody, and he had done other things which it is not necessary to mention here.

In the chase after Ryan, as he was generally called, that followed, Patsy had worked out a plan by which he thought he could prevail upon Ryan to surrender the stolen money, and in following out that plan to its logical end he had succeeded in offending his chief.*

A bare statement of the facts is as follows:

Patsy had succeeded in ingratiating himself with Ryan to such an extent that he traveled with him in an automobile almost across the State of New York. At the end of that journey, Ryan had taken Patsy to call upon the family to whom he had sent the money to keep for him, although, of course, they had no idea of what the package contained that they were holding for him. They were honest, upright people, and knew Ryan only as William Montgomery, which was his middle name. They were absolutely innocent parties in the affair.

But the call there had softened Ryan to such an ex-

*See NICK CARTER WEEKLY, No. 576.

tent that, when he left the house with Patsy, he voluntarily offered to give up the package of money to the young detective on the condition that Patsy would permit him to escape, and would be willing that he should retain so much of the stolen money as was not contained in the package itself. In a word, the package was twenty-five thousand dollars short—and the greater part of that sum was in Ryan's pocket at the time the agreement was made.

Patsy had consented to the arrangement—and there was where the trouble was.

Nick Carter said nothing whatever to Patsy about it until they were back again in New York; and even then he waited a whole day before summoning Patsy to him in his study.

He did not wish to do an injustice to Patsy, and neither did he intend that Patsy should be unjust to himself. He had tried to think the matter out from every standpoint of view before he summoned Patsy to him to "talk it over."

"Patsy," he said, when the young man entered the room and seated himself in the chair his chief indicated, "I want you to tell me exactly how it happened that you calmly permitted Ryan to retain twenty-five thousand dollars of the stolen money, and make his escape with it. I wish to know the inside circumstances, so that if there is anything to excuse your conduct, I may give you the full benefit of it."

"Excuse my conduct! Great Scott! Didn't I recover all that money with the exception of a very small fraction of it?"

"You certainly did, Patsy; but you had the opportunity to recover that fraction also, and it was your duty to do it. You had no moral or logical right to permit Ryan to make his escape with twenty-five thousand dollars of the stolen money."

"I think I did, chief," was the dogged reply.

"In doing it," persisted the detective, "you were giving away what did not belong to you. In doing it, you gave away twenty-five thousand dollars of the trust company's money, and—I must put it harshly, in order to make you comprehend what I mean—in doing that you put yourself on a plane with Ryan; you made yourself his accomplice; you became, theoretically, one with him, for you deliberately took what did not belong to you, and gave it away."

"Do you mean that I *stole* it? Do you mean that—— Great goodness! Are you telling me that I am a thief?"

"I am telling you that, theoretically, you became one when you consented to that transaction."

Patsy started from his chair, hot and angry—and hurt as severely as if he had been struck by a bullet or stabbed with a knife. Then he sank back upon it again, very white and still.

"Go on, chief," he said, in a voice so calm that it made Nick stare for a moment.

"I have waited almost three days before speaking to you about this, Patsy, because I had no desire to be unjust with you. I wanted to think it out correctly; but I can see it from no other standpoint than the one I have named."

"And that standpoint makes a thief of me. You know, of course, chief, that no other living man could use such language to me."

"I am talking to you as your best friend—as a father to you, for I have practically been that, haven't I?"

"Yes. That is why my hands are tied. That is why I cannot resent anything you say."

"And you *do* resent what I am saying, Patsy?"

"I certainly do—with all the manhood and outraged dignity there is in me. If I were bound and gagged, and lying on the floor right there, and you should come to me and kick me and strike me, it would be just about the equivalent to what you are doing now."

A flush crept into the cheeks of Nick Carter, under his eyes. Patsy was right about that, in a certain sense; but none the less Nick felt it his duty to proceed.

"I want you to tell me all the circumstances about that affair, Patsy," he said. "You have never told the full story to me."

"It isn't necessary, now that you have formed your conclusions."

"Nevertheless, I would like to hear it."

Patsy remained silent.

"Why," asked Nick, "when you had the opportunity to get *all* the money, and the man as well, did you presume upon your position, and so far exceed your prerogatives as not only to permit him to escape, but to take twenty-five thousand dollars of the stolen money with him?"

Still Patsy was silent.

"Answer me!" demanded the detective sternly.

"It was what I got, or nothing."

"Better nothing than to have connived at the purloining of twenty-five thousand dollars, or even that many cents."

"That is your view of it; it isn't mine."

"Conner and I were both in the village. You could have turned him over to us. We would have done the rest of it."

"Look here, chief. In the first place, when I received that package of money I had no more idea that you were nearer than three hundred miles from me than the man in the moon. But even if I had, it would have made no difference. I should have done exactly as I did do."

"You knew later that we were there. You knew it in time to——"

"Chief, if I had it to do over again, I should do exactly as I did that night. Ever since you took me off the street, when I was a little ragged arab, you have taught

me that I must never break my word. I had given my word to Ryan. Would you have had me go back on it?"

"No; but you shouldn't give your word immorally."

"I didn't. I gave it in the interests of morality and right doing. I could look my Maker in the face and say as much. I am not ashamed of anything I did that night. In fact, I am proud of it. I glory in it."

"It isn't because you permitted him to escape, Patsy; it is because you allowed him to take with him money that did not——"

"Oh, I understand you. You have said that to me several times already."

"Patsy!"

Patsy crossed the room to the window, and stood there looking through it for two or three moments. Then he turned back into the room again.

"Chief," he said, "don't make me angry. Don't hurt me as you are doing. I did what I believed to be for the best—what I still believe to have been for the best. I recovered all that stolen money but twenty-five thousand dollars, and I permitted Ryan to make his escape with that much. I even assisted him to escape. I let you and Conner follow me all around the village, when all the time Ryan was standing on the platform at the railway-station, waiting for a train to take him out of town. I purposely led you and Conner astray on the matter in order that Ryan might get away; and afterward, when you came to the hotel where I was registering, I led you to believe that he was still somewhere near. I think I told you that he was not far away—not more than a few miles."

"Yes; you did."

"Well, it was the truth. I had heard the train come in and pull out. He couldn't have been more than three miles from us when we were talking."

"But the twenty-five——"

"I tell you I had to take what I got or nothing. He was in a soft mood, after his call that night, and he gave me the package of his own accord. If there had been any effort to arrest him, somebody would have been killed, and certainly Ryan would have killed himself rather than be taken. I consider that I saved at least two lives that night, as well as all the money, except a tiny fraction of it."

"That does not alter the moral aspect of the case."

"Pardon me, but I think it does."

"You took the law into your own hands; more than that, you deliberately took a sum of money belonging to the trust company, and gave it away."

"I didn't. I never saw or touched the money, and you know it. I didn't even know that the package contained money. I took Ryan's word for it. He told me that he had the other twenty-five in his pocket, save for two or three thousand of it that he had spent. I believed that, too."

"Nevertheless, the trust company expects you to make restitution."

"It does? Well, I'll see the trust company in Halifax first."

"Then I will have to do it for you, since you were my employee."

"You may do as you like about that, but I'll tell you right now that the trust company will never get a cent of my money."

CHAPTER II.

THE WAY OF THE TRANSGRESSOR.

Both were silent for a considerable time after that, but presently Nick Carter spoke again.

"I wish I could make you see it as you should see it, Patsy," he said.

"And I wish with all my heart, chief, that I could make you see it as I *do* see it. I am sure that you would take a different view of the matter."

"I don't see that there is any other view to take, possibly."

"Why? Let me go over the facts for a moment."

"I wish you would. Possibly I am not entirely conversant with them."

"Well, then, there were a good many things that focused together to make a point for me that night."

"Well?"

"In the first place, Billy Studley, which is Ryan's right name, was once an intimate friend of yours; you were playmates and chums when you were boys."

"That fact should have had no weight whatever with you."

"Please do not interrupt me."

"Go on, then."

"He went wrong, and you dropped him. He hadn't stolen anything in those days, as I understand it; he only gambled, and drank, and went with dissolute people, so that you would have nothing to do with him."

The detective nodded his head.

"A short time ago—no, I'll go back further than that. Several years ago, long before I knew that such a man lived, he got married. The marriage was an unhappy one; there were domestic-troubles enough to craze a man—he has told me a little about them—and he and his wife separated. Because of two children there was no divorce."

"My dear Patsy, what in the world has all that to do with the matter under discussion?"

"I am coming to that if you won't interrupt me."

"Well?"

"About a year ago he met a young woman with whom he fell in love. He committed bigamy to make her his wife. I don't excuse the act. It was a dastardly thing to do, and he ought to have been shot for it; but I

see it from his standpoint as he saw it from hers, now since I rode across the State in an automobile with him.*

"There was a man named Wheeler who was in love with the girl. Boston Wheeler made it his business to look up the record of Jasper Ryan, which was the name he used in marrying the second time, and discovered that he was Billy Studley, a married man, with a wife somewhere in the New England States."

"Patsy——"

"Wait, please. Ryan found out that Wheeler knew his secret. He became terrorized lest he would tell it to Lydia—not on his own account, but because of the horror it would bring to her. He wanted to go away—to take her to the other end of the world; in a word, to Argentina, but he had not the money to do it."

"So he stole it."

"Exactly. So he stole it; but that was the reason he stole it—*to spare Lydia the suffering of a revelation.*"

"That does not belittle the crime, Patsy."

"Not one whit; but it explains the man—and it's the man I'm talking about; not his crimes."

"Well?"

"Then, the very night he went away, before he had been half an hour away from the house, Boston Wheeler murdered Lydia, as we all know, and I happened to get there before she died.† You remember the letter that he wrote to me about it as well as I."

"Yes."

"Then he was arrested. But for me he would have been charged with Lydia's murder, so you see there were two things which he considered he owed to me: one, the fact that I cared for Lydia in her last moment, and also that I had saved him from being charged with her murder. The story of his two escapes I need not touch upon, but when he ran away with me in the automobile after knocking me out and then giving me morphin, we had a heart-to-heart talk the next morning at a little country hotel where we stopped.

"We talked about Lydia, mostly. He loved her if ever a man loved a woman. He made me a proposition that I travel with him for a week in the Packard car, giving my parole that I would do nothing to cause his arrest while I was with him, or to put you or others on his track; but it was agreed that if an arrest should occur, or was threatened, I was to take a neutral attitude.

"I thought I saw in that opportunity a chance to recover the stolen money. I had found the soft place in Ryan's heart, and I believed I could induce him to give up the money—as I did; so I went with him.

"When we arrived at our destination, where he had sent the money, he took me to call upon some people who were cousins of Lydia's. They were fine, sweet, lovely people, as good as gold and as pure as snow. The atmosphere of that house regenerated Ryan. He was another being when we came outside.

"We walked down the dark street to where we had left the automobile, and then he said to me:

"'Patsy, you may step behind me, if you will, and shoot me. I think I would be obliged to you. This package contains all the stolen money except twenty-five thousand dollars, most of which I have in my pockets now. Will you do it?'

"'Don't be a fool,' I told him.

"There was some more talk about it, and presently he said:

"'Patsy, if I should give you this package into your hands now, would you be willing to let me keep what I've got in my pockets, and make good my escape? Would you?'

"I thought very deeply on his question before I replied to it. I tried to view it from every side; and while I was thinking he said, in effect:

"'If you can do that, it will enable me to get away, out of the country, where I can begin over and make a good man of myself, and that is what I will do; but Patsy I will never be taken. I will kill others and then myself before I ever submit to arrest. Will you take the package and let me go?'

"I told him I would, and he gave the package to me then and there.

"Before we entered the car he turned again and said:

"'Patsy, will you shake hands with me?' And I shook hands with him, and I am glad I did.

"We got into the car, then, and he drove it down through a back street of the village to where there was a shed. You know where it was. We got out and left the car there, and he handed me the spark-plug. Then we started up the main street of the village toward the hotel, having no more idea that you and Conner were in the town than the man in the moon.

"Half-way up the street to the hotel, I happened to look across it, and saw you and Conner strolling along together.

"It was a revelation to me. I knew that somehow you had trailed us all the way across the State. I was amazed.

"I caught Ryan by the arm, pulled him back into a shadow out of sight, and pointed toward you.

"He laughed a little, in his queer way, and said:

"'That means suicide for me, Patsy. There is a train leaving here a little after ten that I intended to take, but now it's all over.'

"'Not a bit of it,' I told him. 'You've got my word, and I'm going to stick to it. Skip, now. Go to the station and stay there till the train comes, and leave the rest to me.' I had the package of money in my hand then, but I shoved it under my arm, partly out of sight.

*†See NICK CARTER WEEKLY, No. 576.

"We shook hands again—I'm proud of that, too—and he turned and left me.

"I waited a minute until I knew he was beyond your sight, and then I strolled leisurely up the street where you would see me. I knew that you and Conner would take my trail, thinking that I would lead you to Ryan.

"I went around a corner and entered a lawyer's office, and I left the package of money in his safe for the night. He had been working late, and was at his office, as I had been informed. When I came out again you and Conner were across the street, and I purposely led you for a long walk around the town in order to give Ryan time to get on his train; then I returned to the hotel. You know the rest, for you spoke to me while I was registering.

"That's the whole story, chief. If I did wrong, I don't see it, and I don't believe anybody can make me see it, either. I'd do it all over again in the same way under the same circumstances. Now, what have you got to say?"

"Exactly what I said at the start: That you gave away money that did not belong to you, and, therefore, placed yourself in the light of an accomplice with Ryan."

"All right. Let it go at that. But I never saw the money, never had it in my possession, and never knew a moment when I could have taken possession of it; so how could I give it away?"

"Morally you had possession of it."

"Fudge! Morally or physically, either, I had nothing of the sort. I was under parole with Ryan; but even if I had not been, I could not have taken that money away from him. He is every bit as powerful a man as you are, and you know it. You have told me so yourself. Could I tackle him, with any show at all, even if I had been cad enough to go back on my word?"

"No; you could have done neither. What you could have done, what you should have done, was to have told me all the truth when I spoke to you at the hotel. Then I could have telegraphed ahead of that train, to Elmira, for instance, and Ryan would have been captured."

"Well, I didn't."

"And by not doing it, you knowingly permitted him to escape with twenty-three thousand dollars of the trust company's money on his person."

"I did; and I would do it again."

"Your parole, as you call it, even under the broadest construction, was over and past the moment Ryan boarded that train—wasn't it?"

"Yes; but I had given him another promise in the meantime."

"Patsy, how much money have you got in the bank now?"

"About thirty thousand dollars; why?"

"And you have nearly a hundred thousand more, that you have earned since you have been with me that is out on investment, haven't you?"

"Yes: a trifle more than that."

"Well, Patsy, I want you to go down to the trust company and give them your check for that twenty-three thousand dollars."

"Chief, I will *not* do it. It isn't the money, but it's the principle of the thing. If I do such a fool thing as that, I am practically admitting all that you have been unkind enough to insinuate, and I won't place myself in that position."

"Then I will have to do it for you."

Patsy shrugged his shoulders. Nick Carter left his chair and stood in front of him.

"Patsy," he said, "it is either that, or we must—part."

Patsy stared with unwinking eyes and bated breath into Nick Carter's face. He could not believe that he had heard aright.

"You—you don't mean—that—do you?" he murmured presently.

"Yes, Patsy, I mean every word of it."

And then Patsy's wrath blazed forth; not in words, but in fierce resentment. He stumbled to his feet somehow, and, without another word, left the room.

CHAPTER III.

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS.

And so Patsy was angry, resentful, sullen, and cross. But Patsy was also proud.

He felt that an injustice had been done him—was being done to him.

It was true that Nick Carter had taken him off the street when he was a ragged urchin, and had made him all that he was to-day; but he felt that he had done his duty, and that he had earned what he owned.

He went to his room and stood there for an hour, staring out of the window. He went over in his mind all that had occurred in his association with Ryan, and still he could not see himself in the wrong.

"If Nick could have seen Ryan as I saw him, could have known him as I knew him, could have read him as I read him, he would think differently," he muttered to himself once; and again: "If Mrs. Carter were alive—if Ethel were here now, this would not have happened. She would have understood."

But Ethel had been dead more than three years.

After a while he began to walk around his room tentatively, touching this thing and that as he passed, and gritting his teeth to keep back the emotions that surged up from his heart.

"I'll have to go out and purchase two or three trunks to put all this truck into," he murmured presently. "Let me see, I will want a leather steamer-trunk to travel

with, and two large ones for storage. That will do it, I think."

He passed down the stairs and out of the house; but within half an hour he was back again, riding on the express-wagon with the driver, and within a few minutes his three trunks were in his room.

He began packing, then, sorting as he packed, depositing such things as he wished to send to storage into one or the other of the larger trunks, and the things he would require to use in the leather trunk.

Four pictures he took carefully from the walls and deposited in the leather trunk. They were of Ethel—now dead—of Nick—now angry at him—of Ten-Ichi, now in Japan, and of Chick, who ought to be somewhere around the house, he thought. He wondered why he had seen or heard nothing of Chick that morning.

He worked on undisturbed until the room was desolated; until it was barren of all its attractiveness; until the two big trunks were filled, and there only remained a few lesser articles to pack into the leather trunk and in his bag.

Then he closed and strapped the big trunks, completed the packing of the smaller one and strapped that, crammed the few remaining things into his bag, and was about to pick it up and pass down the stairs when there was a tap at the door, and Chick entered the room.

He halted in surprise just across the threshold, and stared.

"Why, Patsy," he exclaimed, "what in the world are you about?"

"I'm moving," was the laconic reply.

"Moving! What do you mean?"

"I'm going away."

"Where to?"

"I haven't determined yet. I've got an accomplice who is on his way to Argentina; I think I'll chase after him."

"Patsy, are you crazy?"

"Almost; and I will be, quite, if you don't shut that trap of yours and stop asking questions, Chick."

"But what has happened to you?"

"Fired."

"Whaaaat?"

"I've been dishonorably discharged, without a character. The chief says I'm a thief; an accomplice of Ryan's—and I guess I am. If I am, I'm glad of it. I think if I had a chance to get next to that infernal trust company right now, I'd touch them for a few hundred thousand myself. The only regret I have is that I recovered any money at all for them. The beastly hogs!"

"Do tell me what has happened, Patsy," said Chick.

"I have told you already. The chief has fired me."

"Do you really mean it?"

"Go and ask him, if you don't believe me."

"I will," and Chick was turning away when Patsy called to him.

"Wait a minute, Chick, won't you? I've got something to say to you; and, besides, it may as well be 'good-by' now, for I'll be gone in a few minutes."

"Won't you wait until I have seen and talked with Nick?"

"No. What's the use? You know him as well as I do. When he says a thing, it goes. He has told me that we must part, and so we part. That's all there is about it."

"But what is it all about? Why has he done this?"

"Because I let Ryan skip with twenty-three thousand dollars in his pocket. I brought back half a million, but that doesn't count."

"You wait here till I see Nick, won't you?"

"No; I won't. I won't wait here another minute. I've got everything packed, and I'm going out now to get an expressman."

"It won't take ten minutes, Patsy."

"What won't take ten minutes?"

"To see Nick."

"It won't take one minute to see him, but it would take a thousand years before you could make him change his mind. And, besides, Chick, it wouldn't make any difference now if he did change it; I should go, just the same."

"You don't mean that?"

"Yes, I do mean it."

"Where are you going? What are your plans?"

"I don't know, and I haven't any. I haven't had time to think yet. The thing came upon me like lightning out of a clear sky."

"What are you going to do with those trunks?"

"I'm going to send two of them to storage and take the other one with me wherever I go. For to-night it will go to a hotel. I wish I could have foreseen this four days ago; I'd have gone with Ryan."

"Patsy, you don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh, yes, I do. Chick, I'll—I'll write to you as soon as I know anything about where I am going or what I am going to do. It isn't as if I were poor, you know, and going off in search of a job. I've got plenty of money in the bank, and I'll take a letter of credit with me wherever I go."

He picked up his satchel and strode toward the door.

"Good-by, Chick," he said, extending his right hand. "We've been more like brothers than anything else all these years, so let's part as brothers; and we'll keep in touch with each other somehow; eh?"

"Patsy, I can't bear to have you go in this way."

"There is nothing else to do, old man; not a thing in life. The chief thinks I did wrong. I believe I did right, and I will continue so to believe to the end of my days. He as much as told me I was a thief, and I can't

stand for that, even from him. But I want you to tell him for me, after I have gone, that I love him just the same as ever. There isn't any difference in that, and couldn't be."

"Aren't you going in to say good-by to him?"

"No; what's the use. You just say good-by for me. Tell him that I went away without any resentment toward him, but very badly hurt and wounded. Shake, Chick."

The two shook hands silently, and then it was Patsy who led the way down the stairs to the second floor, where the detective's study was located.

As he was passing the door, it opened, and Nick stood on the threshold.

There was the faintest tinge of surprise in his eyes when he saw Patsy's readiness for the street, and discovered the bag in his hand.

"Where are you going, Patsy?" he asked.

"I haven't decided as yet," was the reply. "I may take a run over to Japan to see Ten-Ichi, or I may follow Ryan to Argentina. Just now I am a little inclined toward the latter. It is well for accomplices in crime to hang together, isn't it?"

"Patsy, you are impertinent."

"I didn't mean it for an impertinence. However, as you seem bent on misunderstanding me to-day, you may take it as you please, chief."

Nick was silent for a moment. He realized that he had perhaps gone too far with Patsy.

He had forgotten that Patsy was no longer a boy.

After a moment he asked:

"Does that satchel mean that you are leaving the house?"

"It certainly does. I have everything packed. The expressman will be here for my trunks as soon as I can get one."

"Your trunks!"

"Yes; I've been out and bought a few."

"Come inside the study. I want to talk with you."

"No, thank you, chief. I think we have done all the talking that is good for either of us for one day; at least I have. I'll say good-by right here and now, if you don't mind."

"But I never intended that you should go away like this, Patsy."

"Didn't you? It sounded mightily like it to me. I'm going, anyhow. I just asked Chick to tell you that I was going away without any resentment, and I want you to know that, chief."

"Were you going away without coming in to say good-by to me?"

"I was."

"Patsy, what has come over you?"

"A very large, heavy, black cloud has been put over me. It didn't come over me at all."

"Nick," called out Chick from the second step of the stairs where he had stopped, "don't let him go. Please don't."

"Hush, Chick! I don't want you to go away from the house, Patsy. I didn't mean that."

"You told me plainly that if I did not do certain things, we must part. I won't do them, and, therefore, we part. That seems to me to be all there is to it. I have grown about twenty years older in the last two hours, chief, but if I were a hundred years older, I wouldn't alter my opinion of my conduct in regard to Ryan one hair's breadth. I don't deny you your right to yours, but I insist upon my right to mine. I have been with you almost seventeen years now, and you have been like a father to me, just as Lady Ethel was always a mother to me, Heaven bless her! If you care to shake hands with me, I'll be glad. If you don't, why——"

"Why, Patsy, are you mad? Have you gone clean out of your senses?"

"Pretty nearly, I guess. I have heard that when a bullet hits a man the first sensation is one of paralysis; that's about how I feel now. There is my hand, if you care to say good-by."

Nick grasped it and tried to draw Patsy into the study, but he braced himself against the door-frame and resisted.

"Please don't do that," he said coldly.

He jerked his hand away and strode along the hall toward the other stairs.

"Good-by, chief," he called back. "Good-by, Chick. Have Joseph look out for that expressman when he comes, will you?"

A moment later they heard the street-door close, and knew that Patsy was indeed gone.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WAY THAT PATSY READ HIM.

When Patsy left the house he carried his grip around to the Imperial Hotel and left it in the parcel-room. Then he went into the telephone-booth and called up the Maritime Exchange.

"I want you to tell me," he said, "if there is any sort of a tramp-ship in port that is about to sail for Argentina? I mean, of course, a ship that would take one passenger. I am not a fugitive from justice, so don't get that bee in your bonnet."

"Wait a moment," came the answer; and then Patsy could hear him call out to somebody in the room down there:

"Captain, come here."

After that there was a low-toned conversation that he could not hear, and then the voice inquired:

"Where are you?"

"At the Imperial Hotel, Broadway and 32nd Street."

"There is a captain here beside me who sails to-morrow for Montevideo, which is practically the same thing. He says he will wait here for you if you care to come down and see him."

"Good! Tell him I'll be there just as soon as the subway can take me."

A few minutes later he walked into the Maritime Exchange, and presently he was presented to Captain Travers, of the *Oriento*, whereat the two withdrew to one of the settees.

"Where is your ship lying now, captain?" Patsy asked.

"She's over at Martin's Stores, in Brooklyn. I shall sail at daylight in the morning, or as soon after that as I can get off. The *Oriento* is a fourteen-knot ship, too. You won't find many tramps that can do that."

"I suppose not."

"If you really think you would like to be a passenger with me, I can accommodate you. I have accommodations for two only."

"Two, eh? Is the other berth taken?"

"Yes; several days ago."

"Indeed. A man or a woman?"

"A gentleman, like yourself. If you decide to go you had better come aboard before dark to-night. It will be easier than getting there before daylight in the morning."

"Decidedly. Yes, I'll go with you, if your terms are not too steep."

"They are very reasonable."

After that there were only the details to decide upon, and they were quickly disposed of, so Patsy presently took his leave of the captain, promising to be aboard the *Oriento* before dark. He also left a fair deposit with him, to insure his going.

On the way up-town he stopped at his bank and arranged his money matters satisfactorily, also providing himself with a plentiful supply of cash; then he went to a storage warehouse and had them send at once for the two large trunks, and then he did some shopping, for he knew that he would want some books to read, a rug to wrap himself in, a steamer-chair for comfort, and a dozen or more other small things which are part and parcel with a sea voyage.

In the middle of the afternoon he returned to the Imperial and ate a hearty dinner, and he wrote a letter to his sweetheart, Cozine, in Philadelphia, and then he leaned back in a chair to smoke and think until it was time to go to the steamer.

He did not notice a man seated at the opposite side of the room, also partaking of an afternoon dinner, who kept eying him strangely. He was too much taken up with his own thoughts to notice anything around him.

Once the man half-started to his feet as if he would speak to him, but a second thought drove him back upon his chair again.

But it seemed as if the sight of Patsy fascinated him; as if he could not keep his eyes off him.

At last, however, he rose and left the room, passing through to the writing-room across the hall.

By and by Patsy roused himself, looked at his watch, rose to his feet, lighted a fresh cigar, and sought the carriage-clerk.

"Hello, Tom," he said.

"How do you do, Mr. Garvan? Is there something that I can do for you?"

"Yes; send one of your best drivers and a good horse around to the house after my leather trunk. He'll have to go up to my room to get it, but it isn't very heavy."

"I'll send one of the porters with him."

"All right. I'm off on a vacation, and just for the present I don't care to let anybody know where I have gone, so if Chick or any of them should come around asking——"

"I am not to know. What shall be done with the trunk? I suppose you will wait here for the return of the carriage?"

"Yes; and then I want to be driven to Martin's Stores, in Brooklyn. Right near the Fulton ferry. There's a couple of dollars for your trouble, Tom."

But Patsy was not to get off so easily as he supposed, for when the carriage returned with the leather trunk, it had Chick for a passenger.

"Come over here into the corner, Patsy," he said, the moment they had grasped hands. "I want to talk to you."

"I haven't got any too much time, Chick," was the reply; "but I guess I can give you a matter of fifteen minutes."

"Patsy, I want you to give up this fool business, and come back to the house with me."

"Not on your life, Chick. Nothing doing."

"Nick wants you, too."

"He hasn't said so."

"He said so this morning."

"He didn't say it in the right way, then. Anyhow, it's too late now. I've booked my passage, and I'm going."

"Where are you going?"

"To South America. I'm going to Uraguay first. After that I don't know. I'll probably go into the ranching business down there."

"Nonsense."

"Perhaps."

"When do you sail?"

"At daylight to-morrow morning. I'm going aboard to-night."

"I'll ride over to the ship with you. Where is it?"

"No; I don't want you, Chick. I'd rather leave you here. It is hard enough as it is. What is the use of piling up the agony. We've said good-by once."

"Honestly, Patsy, I don't believe that Nick had any idea you would take what he said in the manner you did. I think he is terribly cut up about it, although he hasn't said a word."

"Oh, drop it, Chick. I'm tired of the whole subject. But I'll just tell you what I'll do."

"What?"

"I'll bet you a house and lot with a cupalo on it that before the year is out, Ryan will send that full twenty-five thousand dollars back to the trust company. Mind you, he didn't say he would. He made no promises, and no breaks; but that was the way I read him; that was what I thought his manner meant that night when I parted with him."

"Why didn't you tell Nick that?"

"What good would it have done? It is only a guess on my part. I've got nothing, not a thing, in life to build that opinion upon save my own judgment; but if ever I saw truth and solemn resolution in a man's eyes, his contained them that night."

"I am glad to hear you say it."

"Mind you, he didn't say a word to lead me to that opinion. All that he asked was that I would take the package and leave him the balance to get away with. Chick, in my place, wouldn't you have done as I did?"

"I don't know, Patsy. We are always governed by conditions, in such things, and you alone know what those conditions were—but I think I would."

So absorbed were they in their conversation that neither of them noticed the gentleman who was seated a short distance away, and who watched them furtively all the while they were talking.

It was the same man who had dined when Patsy did, and who had watched him then; now he seemed less inclined to speak to them, but none the less interested.

He was a white-haired old gentleman, who seemed to be prematurely aged, as if from illness. He walked with a cane, upon which he leaned heavily, and with uncertain and shuffling tread.

But his eyes were as bright as buttons, for all that.

It was four o'clock when Patsy rose and said to Chick:

"I hate to drive you away, old fellow, but really I must go now. I'll write to you as soon as I arrive at the other end of the route. In the meantime you can write to me at Montevideo, and I will find your letter or letters there when I arrive."

"I'll do it, Patsy. Won't you let me go to the steamer with you?"

"No; honestly, I don't want you. It would only make it harder."

"We'll miss you terribly, Patsy."

"Well, I hope you will."

"You'll come back after a while; after you have cooled off a little."

"Oh, I have cooled off now. It isn't that. Give my love to the chief. Say good-by to Joseph and Mrs. Peters for me. Remember me to Conner, if you happen to see him. I was going to keep it a secret from you, where I had gone, but now that I have seen you again, I don't care whom you tell. It makes no difference."

"No; it could make no difference. Speaking of Conner, he is over at the house now."

"Remember me to him. Tell him I'm sorry that I didn't see him. Now, Chick, good-by, and Heaven bless you."

"And you, Patsy. Confound you! I've half a mind to jolt you just one for making me feel like this."

"Do so. Do it, Chick. I won't hit back."

They were both laughing, but with tears in their eyes, for all that. It was the worst wrench that either of them had ever had, save when Ethel was killed. But then, nothing could be quite as bad as that was.

And so Patsy was driven away while Chick stood on the curb watching the departing carriage with his heart in his eyes.

Presently, however, he turned away and took his way homeward, walking slowly.

Patsy and he had been like brothers always; and something more than brothers, too.

When he arrived home he found Nick and Conner in the library, and Nick asked instantly of him:

"Did you see Patsy?"

"Yes. I saw him. He has gone. He sails at daylight."

"Sails? Sails where?"

"For Montevideo, in Uraguay."

"Still resentful?"

"I don't think he is resentful at all; I think he was only badly wounded by what you said to him, and—I don't think you had any call to say it in the way you did, either."

"Where does he sail from?" asked Conner. "I'd like to go and see him off."

"I don't know where the ship is. He didn't tell me, and I didn't ask. I wanted to go to it with him, but he wouldn't hear of it."

"Montevideo, eh?" mused Conner, half-aloud. "I shouldn't wonder if his going there has saved me a trip in that direction myself. What's the name of the ship?"

"I didn't ask him that, either."

"Oh, well, it's easily discovered."

CHAPTER V.

A MORNING OF SURPRISES.

There were surprises all around, for everybody concerned in this tale, the following morning, but we will have to approach them one at a time.

Nick Carter's was an unhappy household that night.

The departure of Patsy had desolated it, and even the unfailing good humor of Conroy Conner, who was Nick's guest, could not allay the gloom.

Chick went to his room early, and read a book through before he retired, so his light was not out till almost dawn.

Nick and Conroy played chess in the library till midnight, when Conner went to bed and the detective to his study, where he also occupied his mind with extrinsic matters till nearly dawn.

The surprise came in the morning at the breakfast-table.

It was in the form of a letter which bore the engraved heading of the Blankety Trust Company of America, and it read:

"My Dear Mr. Carter: It may interest you to know that just at the hour of closing we are in receipt of a communication from William M. Studley, once our employee, in which he encloses a cashier's check on the Plumb National Bank for twenty-five thousand dollars, thus making good every cent of the loss we sustained through him.

"He offers no explanation of the act. He merely says (I quote): 'You will find enclosed herewith the balance of the loss you sustained through me. I only wish to add that I regret exceedingly the worry and trouble I have caused you. I would be obliged if you will acquaint Nick Carter with this information.' Odd, isn't it? But Studley, or Ryan, as he seems now to be better known, was always a queer fellow.

"Very truly yours,
"Pettibone Peabody, Pres't."

"Patsy read his man correctly, after all, it seems," said Nick sadly, as he passed the letter across the table to Chick. "I suppose it's too late to catch the lad and tell him the good news, isn't it?"

"He was to sail at daylight," said Chick. "He is out on the ocean by this time."

"Well, you must write to him at Montevideo; or I will. We both will. I wish those tramp-steamers carried wireless. It was a tramp, wasn't it?"

"I don't know anything at all about it more than I have already told you," said Chick irritably.

"Conner," said Nick, turning to his friend, "you made a remark last night which I meant to ask you to explain. I'll do it now."

"Yes? What was it?"

"When Chick told us that Patsy had gone to Montevideo, you said you thought perhaps his going there had saved you a trip in that direction yourself."

"So I did."

"What did you mean by it?"

"When I got back from Europe and reported at Washington, the chief told me that he hardly wanted to let me off on a vacation, because somebody had to go to Montevideo, and he thought I was the one for it. I told him to keep it, then, for two weeks, anyhow, and he said he would. That's all I know about it. But it struck me last night that if Patsy is there, I can cable him all there is to it, whatever it may be, and that he might attend to it for me, thus saving me the trip."

"H'm! Well, if you can do it, I wish you would. Give him something to do from home, and it will bring him back again. I don't want him to get too thoroughly weaned from the nest."

"You shouldn't have let him go at all, Nick."

"I know that now, when it is too late."

The other surprise that we have to record here happened on board the steamship *Oriento*, just as she passed outside Sandy Hook.

Patsy, when he left Chick at the Imperial Hotel, had gone directly to the vessel, where he found the captain expectantly awaiting him.

He learned that he was to have a very comfortable room indeed, and when he had his things thoroughly stowed away to his satisfaction, he went on deck again, sought the captain, and thanked him for his attentions.

"Oh, that's all right," said the jovial sailorman. "I like good company, and I like to make my company comfortable. If there is anything that you want, and can't find, while you are aboard this ship, ask for it, and if we've got it you shall have it."

"That is very kind of you, captain."

"My motto is 'Live and let live; praise God, and do the best you can; look pleasant, think well of others and others will think well of you.' That's rather long, isn't it? But it's a good maxim to follow, young man."

"It certainly is."

"I took a shine to you the moment I saw you yesterday. We'll have a pleasant voyage together, or I'm no judge."

"I think we will, sir. How about your other passenger?"

"Oh, he's all right, too. He's a man with a history."

"With a history?"

"Yes; and not a very pleasant one, either, if I'm a good guesser. But he's a fine fellow, as you will see for yourself to-morrow."

"Has he come aboard yet?"

"No; he won't be here till after dark, I reckon. He said he might be late. I told him I'd wait up for him till eight bells."

"How old a man is he?"

"Well, he's some older than you are. I'll make you acquainted with each other as soon as I discharge the pilot to-morrow. Now, young man—I suppose I really ought to be more formal and call you Mr. Garvan, eh?"

"My name is Patsy, if you like that better. That is what all my friends call me."

"Bully for you, Patsy. I knew I'd like you. Have you got any appetite? Dinner'll be ready in about half an hour."

"I ate a hearty dinner less than three hours ago."

"Sho! Did you? Well, you'll have to try to eat some more, then."

And Patsy did try, and succeeded very well indeed; but it was not long after his dinner—his second one—that he retired to his cabin.

"I'm a little bit done up to-night, I think, captain, and if you don't mind, I'll turn in."

"Go ahead, my son. Suit yourself. The cargo's all in and there won't be any noises to disturb you to-night. We'll cast off at daylight, and by the time your out of your bunk, we'll be down to the Hook."

If Patsy had remained on deck, he would have witnessed the arrival of the other passenger at about ten o'clock—and he would have seen the same old gentleman who had watched him so curiously while he was at the Imperial.

The captain received him with his customary warmth, and with something else added to it, for he took him by the arm and hustled him along the deck to the chart-room, where they were presently seated together.

And then, lo and behold! a strange transformation-scene took place.

The old man deliberately removed wig and beard, put aside his cane, and stood revealed a man of considerably less than middle age, as full of life and vigor and strength as Patsy himself.

"Well," said the captain, who seemed not in the least surprised, "did you do it?"

"I did, captain."

"And you feel a lot better, don't you?"

"Better? That doesn't express it, captain. I feel that I can breathe the free, pure air again, as if it belonged to me as well as to others. I feel like a convict who has cast off his chains."

"Like a ship's hull with the barnacles scraped off, hey?" laughed the captain. "There is nothing like it, is there? A clean conscience is the finest thing in all the world."

"Mine isn't quite clean yet."

"Yes, it is. There may be a stain or two left, but they won't do any harm as long as you know they're there and keep rubbing on 'em. You got through all right, did you?"

"Yes. Perfectly, thanks to your assistance."

"Tut, tut! I was your father's friend; why shouldn't I be yours? Live and let live, you know, and do the best you can. To-day you have done the best you could; and now you must live up to the rest of it: Look pleasant, think well of others and they will think well of you. Look here! You're tired out."

"Yes, I am rather fagged, that's a fact."

"Well, the captain's orders are that you turn in at once. In the morning, when we get down to the Hook I'll introduce you to the other passenger."

"What? Have you got another one?"

"Sure thing."

"I hope it isn't anybody who will recognize me; who has ever known me."

"Bah! Nonsense, and tut, tut! He's a fine young fellow. One that you'll like and tie to, I imagine. It'll be just the best thing in the world for you to have congenial company on the voyage. I looked him over pretty carefully before I accepted him. He's down below now, sound asleep."

"Well, good night, captain."

"Good night, my lad. You're rather old to be called my lad, but you know I remember you when you weren't more'n so high. Go to bed now."

In the morning when Patsy went on deck the vessel was just beginning to feel the first roll of the ocean swell.

A warm, southerly breeze greeted him as he stepped out and he went to the rail and stood there looking at Sandy Hook until he heard a step behind him, and turned, expecting to greet the captain.

But it was not the captain.

For a moment Patsy stood spellbound by the apparition that confronted him, and the other man was no less astonished than he. It was, however, the other who spoke first.

"*Patsy!*" he exclaimed; and almost in the same breath Patsy cried out:

"Ryan!"

Their hands clasped, and for a moment they stood looking at each other, each speechless with amazement.

"What brought you here, Patsy?" asked his friend, at last.

"I'll tell you all about it later on, Billy," replied Patsy. "I'll say this, however. My presence here has nothing to do with you. I had no——"

"Oh, I know that. You wouldn't have come, if they had tried to send you after me."

"No; I would not. That's a fact."

"Patsy, I have got something to tell you; something that you will be glad to hear; something that will please you."

"Have you? What is it?"

"Yesterday afternoon, just at the closing-hour, I paid in at the Blankety Trust Company the full sum of twenty-five thousand dollars, thus making them good for all the loss."

"You did?"

"I did."

"Thank Heaven for that!"

CHAPTER VI.

A CABLEGRAM FROM NEW YORK.

"I am sure that I thank Heaven that I was able to do so," said Ryan. "I'll tell you all about that, too, presently. Just now I want to thank you for remembering to call me Billy."

"Well, that's your name, isn't it? Jasper Ryan is not your name, and never was."

"Don't you remember that the last time I saw you I told you that I should assume my middle name, and call myself William Montgomery?"

"Yes."

"Well, I have changed all that, too. I am going out to a new country now; and, Patsy, I'm going to wear my own name, and redeem it, if I can."

"Bully for you, Billy! I'll never call you Ryan again."

"I wish you wouldn't. I am Billy Studley again, and, Patsy, I'm going to redeem the old name from the mire through which I have dragged it."

"I knew you would. I knew what was in your mind the night we parted, although you did not say a word about it. But I knew. I felt it in my bones. I was just as sure of you when I sent you to that train while I led Nick and Conner on a wild-goose chase—I was just as sure of you then as I am now; just as sure as I was of myself."

"I don't know what did it, Patsy. I don't know what worked the change. You did it somehow, I suppose; that is, you started it; and then when I entered that house and saw Lydia's cousin, with her perfect trust in me, it all came home to me that it was worth while to be good. I suppose Nick raised no end of a row when he found that you'd let me walk off with so much money?"

"Yes; that's why I'm here."

"Eh? How's that?"

Patsy explained in detail all that had occurred to him that day, and at the close Studley said:

"Well, Patsy, it will all come out right after a little. When I sent that money to the trust company to-day, I told them that I would like to have Nick Carter informed of the fact that I had made good. He probably knows it by this time."

"I offered to bet with Chick last night that you would make good before the end of the year."

"Did you? I saw you talking together. I knew that something had happened, but I couldn't guess what it was."

"You saw us together?"

"Yes. At the Imperial."

"Where were you?"

"Within a few feet of you most of the time. I took dinner in the same room with you, too. Half a dozen times I was on the point of going over to you and making myself known; but I decided that it was not best."

"It's odd that I didn't see you; or Chick, either."

"I was disguised, Patsy, and I don't think that even Nick would have penetrated it, had he sat down opposite me. I was that old man who dined in the same room with you. Don't you remember?"

"No; I didn't even see you."

"You were too much preoccupied."

"I suppose so. Say, Billy, can I mention a delicate subject?"

"Anything you like, Patsy."

"Now that you paid back all that money—you only had twenty-three thousand and you say you paid back twenty-five—you must be mighty near broke; eh?"

"Well, I'm not actually rolling in wealth. Shall I tell you about it?"

"Yes, if you will."

"When I got back to New York after leaving you, I hunted around for a tramp-ship that would take me to Argentina. I hit upon this one as the first to sail, and came aboard of her to make arrangements for my passage—to find that the captain is a man I have known all my life and who used to be a great friend of my father's."

"That was a coincidence."

"Wait. You shall hear what he did for me."

"Well?"

"He knew me at once, although he hadn't seen me since I was twenty-one—fifteen years. He was delighted to have me for a passenger, and I was delighted to sail with him. I remained right aboard and made the ship my home, and three nights ago I unbosomed myself to the old captain. Made a confessor of him. Told him the whole story without reservation, and ended by confessing that I had the twenty-three thousand dollars with me, and saying that I was going to use it to make more so that I could send the twenty-five back to the bank.

"I won't tell you about our conversation, Patsy; only this: He insisted that I should pay that back to the company at once, he supplying the deficiency for me. And when we get out to Montevideo he is going to stake me to three thousand more, to begin on. Now, what do you think of that for a friend?"

"I think that the old captain will take a seat way down in front when he goes aloft. So it's begin all over, is it, Billy?"

"Yes. It's begin all over. Patsy, I'm just as cool and careful, just as firm and unbending as I was before this change came upon me; but there is something inside that is different. I don't know what it is. I'm no preacher; but it's there, and it's there to stay."

"Isn't it a remarkable coincidence that you and I should, after all, have taken the same ship out of New York? Yesterday morning at this time I had no more idea of going away, than you have now of returning afoot; but here I am."

"Ahoy, there, my hearties!" cried the cheery voice of the captain. "It seems that you need no introduction. Got acquainted without it, eh?"

"We have discovered that we are old friends, captain," said Studley. "This is the young man who took that automobile ride with me across the State of New York, when I was going after the stolen money."

"You don't say so! Lads, the ways of Providence are mysterious, but certain. The pulse of the Almighty beats in every heart, if you will only listen to it, and hear it. Well, well, well! I feel as if I had *two* sons aboard now, instead of one."

"Thank you, sir," said Patsy. "I never knew my father. He died when I was an infant, and my mother when I was a small child."

"Then I'll be a daddy to you, Patsy—you told me to call you that, you know—I'll be a daddy to you, my boy."

"Thank you again, sir."

He turned and left them alone together again.

"Weren't you afraid of being seen and recognized when you returned to New York?" Patsy asked.

"No. I felt perfect confidence in the disguise I wore. It wasn't the first time I had assumed it. You know when I do things I do them thoroughly."

"Yes. I know that."

"I wore it when I went to the bank where I got my cashier's check to pay over to the trust company. Gee! I would like to have seen President Peabody when he opened that letter and found that I had sent him back the balance."

"What are you going to do when you get to the South?" Patsy asked him.

"I don't know. I'll look around for something. You know I was always a money-maker. I'll have a cash capital of three thousand——"

"To which I propose to add ten more."

"No, Patsy, no. At least, not before I have found a place where it can be advantageously invested."

"Won't you take me for a partner?"

"On equal ground—yes."

"Then I'll put up three with your three. That will give us a capital of six thousand; and I've got a letter of credit for thirty more, if we have to use it."

"Great Scott! Patsy, I didn't know that you were worth so much money as that."

"Oh, yes. That, and more, too."

"Tell me why you selected Argentina as your destination, Patsy."

"For the sole and only reason that you told me *you* were going there."

"Is that straight?"

"My presence right here is the proof of it."

"You thought as much of me as that, after the way I used you? You believed in me to that extent without my saying a word?"

"Sure I did. Look here, Billy, you would never have given me that package of money to take back to New York, if you had not meant to return the other as soon as you could do it with safety. That was as plain to me as the nose on your face. I knew you at that moment almost better than you knew yourself."

"I begin to believe you did."

"I have known what was down in your heart, Billy, ever since that day when we talked about Lydia."

"And, Patsy, I might as well confess to you that the turning-point in my career came from just one thing that *you* said to me."

"That I said?"

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"We were talking about what I had expected to do with the money I had stolen. I told you that I meant to take Lydia away where there would never be any chance of her finding out that I had married her when there was another wife living, from whom I had long been parted. You said that I would have been merely getting rid of one nightmare, to pick up another one, and you asked me if Lydia were living which I would rather she would find out: that I was a bigamist or a thief. Do you remember?"

"Yes."

"I told you that I would rather she had known me as a bigamist, for she would at least know that I had become one through love for her; and you replied to that: 'Well, *don't forget that she knows both now.*'

"From that moment, Patsy, that sentence never ceased to ring in my ears. 'She knows both now.' I heard it in the droning of the motor, and—well, that was really what saved me. And then——"

"Oh, let's change the subject. Let's get onto something cheerful."

And so the two talked day after day during that uneventful voyage.

Sometimes the captain sat for hours with them, often they were alone together; and all the time the gallant ship plowed her way through the billows toward the Southern Cross.

It was a warm and beautiful morning of the springtime in the southern hemisphere when they entered the harbor of Montevideo and dropped anchor; and they were barely at rest at the anchorage when a launch came swiftly alongside, and a voice called out:

"Aboard the *Oriento!*"

"Aye, aye!" replied the captain, from the bridge.

"Have you a passenger aboard there named Patrick Garvan?"

"We have."

"Well, I have a cable for him. Instructions came with it to watch for his arrival and to deliver it at once. It's an important message and a very long one. Shall I come aboard?"

"Yes. I'll get the ladder out for you in a moment," replied the captain.

CHAPTER VII.

A CONSPIRACY OF GOVERNMENT SPIES.

Patsy was, of course, on deck, and had heard this conversation.

It did not interest him particularly, because he instantly surmised that the message was either from Chick, beseeching him to return, or that it was from Nick Carter himself, telling of the repayment to the trust company of the last of the money that had been stolen, and requesting his return at once.

But Patsy had resolved not to return at once.

For the first time in his life since he was a small urchin, he was absolutely his own master, and there was a certain sense of freedom about it which he was intensely enjoying.

"What do you suppose it's all about?" asked Studley, turning to him. "I hope, for your sake, that nothing has happened at home since you came away."

"Oh, nothing has happened, Billy. I suppose it is merely a message to tell me what I already know."

"What is that?"

"That you have made good at the bank."

"That's so. I hadn't thought of that."

In the meantime the ladder had been swung overboard and in a moment more the message was in Patsy's hand.

"It's from Conner," he said to Studley, "and it's in cipher. It is quite long, too. It will take me a little time to read it."

"In cipher? Have you a regular code that you use?" asked Studley.

"Yes. One of the chief's own invention. We have all learned it by heart so that we don't have to carry a code around with us to lose; but it is complicated, for all that, and it will take me some little time to read it. I'll go below and study it out, if you don't mind."

"Go ahead, Patsy."

The young detective told the messenger to wait for him, and then he went to his room.

It was half an hour before he returned, and then he called Studley aside.

"I have written out the translation in order to read it to you," he told him. "I haven't determined yet whether to accept the request that is made here or not. I think I will ask your advice about that, Billy. You know we're partners now."

"Sure thing, Patsy."

"Well, listen. This is the message."

Then he read as follows:

"'Important state matter would call me South if you were not there already. Hope you will cable acceptance of assignment at once. A meeting of secret agents—government spies—of six Powers takes place at Buenos Ayres the night of the fifteenth, the purpose of the meeting being to find a quick and sure method to embroil our country and Japan to the point of declaring war. There are two agents sent out by each of the six Powers, and hence there will be twelve men—possibly thirteen—at the meeting. The address in the city at which the meeting will take place is unknown to me. If the facts of the meeting were discovered and brought to light, each of the Powers would, of course, repudiate all knowledge of the matter. It has been arranged so delicately that not a single fact about it could be traced back to its real source. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that there is a deep international plot among these particular Powers to bring about a war with Japan so that during that war our government may be shorn of its strength and power, as well as its wealth. The Powers concerned are Japan, China, Germany, Austria, Italy, and Spain. There is a very good reason to believe that England and France may be concerned in it, also, although we have no definite knowledge of that, so instead of six Powers concerned, there may be eight. Don't forget that the home governments of the agents would instantly repudiate them if the facts leaked out; which means that you must work with care, and exactly as if the case were a private one for a private client. You are representing our government in fact, but on no account should any person suspect it. This assignment for you has the hearty approval of my chief at Washington. We have no idea what sort of a plot will be hatched up, or how it will be worked out. That is for you to determine, and you must inform me at this address, by this code, the instant you have information of importance to communicate. I can give you the name of only one of the agents sure to be present, and that is Von Huysen, one of the Germans. Beware of that man. He is a Cagliostro for talent and a devil for implacability. Tall, handsome, powerful, a soldier, and—outwardly—a gentleman. Further information, if any is at hand, will be cabled to you on receipt of your reply to this, giving an address. We hope that you will receive this about a week before the date of the meeting. Nick sends his love and affection and assurance of full confidence. Chick, also. Ryan matter at bank settled. Case withdrawn, and all indictments against Studley-Ryan quashed.

"'CONNER.'

"The best part of that message, Billy, is the last part," said Patsy heartily, extending his hand cordially to his friend. "You can return to New York now whenever you will, and not be afraid to look a policeman in the face. That is good news to have meet you on your arrival here, isn't it?"

"Indeed it is, Patsy; but I shall never return to New York; at least not to stay there."

"I don't blame you for that."

"My course lies onward and upward. But what about the other part of the message, Patsy?"

"I don't know. It appeals to me, of course. It is my profession."

"Your profession! It is your duty. You are now the duly accredited representative of the United States, to foil a conspiracy against their peace and prosperity. You cannot refuse the assignment. I don't believe you had thought of doing so."

"No; I had not. But—we are partners, Billy. We were going into business together."

"All right, then we will go into this business together first. You shall appoint me your assistant, and we will work together, for the good of Uncle Sam."

"Billy, do you mean that?"

"Of course I mean it."

"Do you remember that I said to you once that you would have made an ideal detective?"

"Yes; and here is a chance to determine if you were right or wrong. Come; that messenger is waiting. He deserves a five-dollar bill for bringing us that news. Write your reply while I give it to him."

Patsy's reply to Conner was short and to the point. It was:

"Message received and terms acceptable. Cable information regarding balance of order as soon as possible, Buenos Ayres. Will leave address at cable office.

"GARVAN."

This was not in cipher.

When the messenger had gone away with the answer, Patsy stood smilingly watching the little launch as it made its way back toward the city, and Studley came up behind him.

"What are you smiling at, Patsy?" he asked.

"I was thinking how short my vacation really was, after all. I am in the harness again, just the same as if I were back in New York."

"Confess, too, that you were thinking about the message that Nick sent to you in that cable: 'Nick sends love and affection and assurance of full confidence.' Weren't you thinking a little bit about that, Patsy?"

"I expect I was, Billy. You see, he was right all the while, and so was I; only he was handicapped because he had not had the chance to read your heart as I did."

"Well, it's all over now, isn't it?"

"Yes. It's all over now. I'll write to the chief as soon as we get to a hotel."

"Patsy, this is the fifth; you know the *Oriente* is a fast ship for a tramp. We have got ten days before that meeting."

"Yes. I had thought of that."

"Probably some of those agents are on the ground already."

"Oh, there isn't a doubt of that. Von Huysen will be here, anyhow."

"Do you know him?"

"I know him by sight. I saw him once in Berlin. Conner doesn't exaggerate about him."

"Does he know you?"

"No; he never even heard of me, so far as I know. It is certain that he doesn't know me."

"We won't have to go into the disguise business, then?"

"Not at present, certainly. But there may be some among the bunch that is coming here who would know me. We will be a bit careful in looking about us.

"I think England and France may only be represented merely as an onlooker. France particularly likes to know what is going on, and she has the cleverest secret agents in the world. It will be a nice game that we'll have to play, Billy."

"An interesting one, at least."

If you have been accustomed merely to studying maps and have never visited the locality itself, you will be surprised to learn that it is a hundred and twenty-five miles as the crow flies, from Montevideo across the mouth of the Rio de la Plata to Buenos Ayres; but almost directly across from Montevideo is the small city of Magdalena, sixty miles away, and from there one may take a railroad to the capital of Argentina.

And that was the route which our two friends selected as being the quickest and the best for their purposes. There is a regular line of steamers between the two capitals, but Patsy believed it best, considering the business they were on, to enter the city of Buenos Ayres as quietly as possible, and he knew this could be done via Magdalena.

When they took leave of the captain, he said to them:

"I shall probably go over there for a cargo, after I have discharged here. Anyhow, I'll see both of you again before I sail away. Don't forget that maxim of mine, lads: 'Live and let live, and do the best you can; look pleasant, think well of others and others will think well of you.' Good-by."

They chartered a big launch to take them to Magdalena; from there a ride of between seventy and eighty miles by rail took them to the capital of Argentina.

"Where shall we put up, Patsy?" asked Studley, when they walked away from the station with their grips in their hands. "What hotel shall we go to?"

"None at all. We will take a couple of rooms near the central part of the city, and get our meals at restaurants. I've got a friend here, somewhere, who will post

us. Here, get into this carriage. I didn't want to take one directly from the station."

"Where to, gintlemen?" asked the driver of the carriage, thus proclaiming himself unmistakably Irish at once.

"Faith, me friend," said Patsy, in reply, adopting the brogue instantly, "it strikes me that you're from the ould sod."

"I am that, sor, and many's the day since I've clapped me two eyes onto it. Me name's Terrence O'Toole, at your service, sir."

"And my name is Patrick Garvan, Terrence; and this is Mr. Studley. Now, Terrence, me boy, do you know where I can find Mr. Morgan James, who is a banker here?"

"I do that, sor."

"Take me to him; and, Terrence, this is a good rig-out you've got here. Does it happen to be your own?"

"It does that, and there ain't a bether wan in the city."

"Well, I'll hire it now, and you, for ten days and nights, as my own private carriage and coachman. We'll arrange terms later on. Now, take us to Mr. James."

"I'll make the terms satisfactory, sor—Mr. Garvan. Bedad, I wish the whole worrrld was Oirish. There'd be some fun in living, then."

CHAPTER VIII.

A WONDERFUL GAME OF BILLIARDS.

They had driven only a short distance when Patsy had another idea, and he leaned out of the carriage-window and called to Terrence to stop.

"Get down here a moment," he said, "I want to speak to you." They had turned off the main thoroughfare by this time and were advancing toward the residential part of the city.

"What is it, sor?" asked Terrence, with his keen, clever Irish face peering in at the window.

"I'll tell you what it is, Terrence, and why I was going to Mr. James at once instead of waiting until his office hours to-morrow. It has occurred to me that perhaps you can do what I intended to ask him to do for me."

"Yis, sor. I'll do it if I can, whatever it is."

"My friend and I do not care to put up at a hotel just at present. We would very much prefer to secure two quiet rooms where we can go in and out at will, and within easy distance of the center of things. Do you think you could find us such a place?"

"I can, sor. I know the very place for you, that is if you're not too particular about the furnishings. It's me sister's house, sor. She's a widow, and although her husband left her well fixed, she sometimes lets out her rooms. It's handy by everything, and there's an entrance from the street and another wan from the coort. Shall I be afther taking you there, sor?"

"Yes. At once."

"I have a room there myself, sor, and me stable is only wan street away, so I'll be handy by whin ye want me," and with that he climbed back upon the box, turned his horses, and drove in the opposite direction.

The rooms were all that Patsy could have wished for: two large adjoining ones, with the entrances as Terrence had described them, and they were comfortably if not luxuriously furnished.

"Now, Terrence," said Patsy, when the arrangements about the rooms were completed, "I have a few instructions to give you."

"Yis, sor."

"You are entirely in my employ for the next ten days. You are to stand ready at all hours to wait upon both of us. You are to have your carriage here at the door every morning, at the hour I shall name. You are never to appear to know me unless I address you first. If I walk out of the house and pass you without speaking, you are to follow at a respectful distance with your carriage. You are to keep me in sight at all times, if it is possible, and if I enter a hotel or any other place, you are to wait outside with your carriage till I reappear. If I make a sign like that—see?—you are to ignore me and give your entire attention to Mr. Studley. If you are with him and he makes the sign, you are to turn your attention to me again. Is that plain?"

"It's as clear as mud, sor."

"Do you thoroughly understand it all?"

"I do."

"Do you speak the language?"

"Sure I've been here goin' on sivinteen years, so I have."

"Do you speak any other language than Spanish and English?"

"I speak French, sor, wid a brogue; and I have a smatterin' of German."

"Good. It is likely, Terrence, that while I am here I

will have to place a great deal of confidence in you. I want to say to you that if at the end of my stay you have deserved it all, your reward will be in proportion."

"You'll find that Terrence O'Toole will be faithful, sor," was the solemn reply. "And I'll say this to you, sor: I don't know what your business is, although mebby I could make a shrewd guess. But there isn't much in this city that I don't know about, and there are mighty few people here, natives or foreign, that I don't know something about. Now, sor, what are the prisent orders?"

"You may drive us around to the hotel that is most frequented by foreigners. What time is it by your watch, Terrence? I'll have to set mine with the time here."

"Ten-thirty-five, sor."

"It's a trifle late in the evening, but I think we'll have a look around us, Billy."

"Late, sor? Sure, the avening is just commincin' in Ayres," said Terrence.

Twenty minutes later they entered the café to which Terrence took them and strolled through the wide expanse of it to the billiard-room.

"Do you play, Billy?" asked Patsy.

"It's my best game, Patsy."

"And mine. Let's have a try." Then, in a lower tone, he added: "And while you are selecting a cue, take the opportunity to inspect the two players at the second table toward the head of the room. The big, handsome man is Von Huysen. I have no doubt that his companion is another one of the conspirators."

Studley nodded, and went for his cue. When he returned Patsy said to him:

"Do you play a particularly good game, Billy?"

"I used to be considered the best amateur in New York, and that's something."

"Good! I think I can beat you. I want you to do your best, however. The point is that I wish to attract attention to our table and game. We will pretend to bet heavily on our play. Are you on?"

"Sure."

"Did you get a look at Von Huysen?"

"Yes."

"Handsome specimen of manhood, eh?"

"All but his eyes. They look like a china dinner-plate, they are so expressionless."

"They are wonderful eyes, Billy; always as hard and as cold as artificial ice. And they never seem to wink. Cruel eyes, and set so wide apart that you wonder they don't unbalance that handsome face of his. Billy, that one man is a host unto himself. He, alone, will be more difficult for us than all the others put together, and I am greatly mistaken if he is not the master spirit of this conspiracy."

"What do you make out the other chap to be? The one who is playing with him."

"He is quite plainly a Frenchman; but it doesn't follow because of that, that he is here to represent France. French spies are all over the world. He may even be Von Huysen's assistant. Are you ready for the play?"

"Yes."

Studley won the bank, and Patsy whispered to him:

"Run as many as you can, right off the reel."

"Tell me first what your object is in attracting attention," said Studley. "It was my idea to keep pretty much in the dark."

"In the dark? Not by any means. Right in the center of the lime-light."

"But why?"

"Remember, Billy, that we are here in this city with—if they're not all here now they soon will be—with fourteen, sixteen, or possibly eighteen of the cleverest international spies in all the world. Remember that they are risking their lives in what they are about. Remember that they will keep their eyes open and their senses on the alert every minute of the time, and don't forget that if any one of them discovered a man or two men in the city who appeared to have no especial reason for being here, but who, nevertheless, kept themselves very much in the background, pains would be taken at once to look that man or those men up thoroughly. If we're in the lime-light, it won't be necessary. We will be placed in the class with all the others."

"I see the point."

"Now, play."

Patsy walked over to a seat against the wall, and Studley posed himself for the first stroke; but before he made it he looked up, and called out:

"How much? One or two?"

"Two," replied Patsy.

"Hundreds or thousands?"

"Suit yourself; only go ahead."

"Thousands, then. Two hundred points."

Patsy nodded and busied himself lighting a cigar; but he knew that several of the loungers had heard what was said, and that it was already whispered around that two Americans were playing for heavy stakes.

A mild interest was directed toward their table; but as Studley played on and on from the break-off, the other tables were gradually deserted, and a ring began to form around the table where the new game had started.

Studley clicked off seventy-two points and then fell down on an easy one, thus leaving the balls in perfect position for Patsy.

He took them well in hand—they had had the table marked off for balk-line, for them—and he began to play with that wonderful skill of which he was a perfect master.

His touch was like velvet; his stroke the perfection of delicacy; his command of the balls perfect. And he played as Jake Shafer plays, with an appearance of carelessness which renders the stroke twice attractive.

And so he clicked off a hundred and twenty before he stopped.

By this time almost everybody in the room had gathered around that table; everybody, in fact, save those who were engaged at other tables, and even they ran over between shots to peer for a moment at the wonderful game that was going on.

Studley took the balls and ran another seventy, thus making him a hundred and forty; and Patsy responded with sixty, making him a hundred and eighty.

And then Studley ran the game out, having made his two hundred points in three innings.

Patsy laughed good-naturedly, took a roll of American money from his pocket, peeled off two one-thousand-dollar bills, and passed them to Studley.

"Try another?" he asked.

"If you like—yes; only that is too short a string, don't you think?"

"Make it four hundred points this time, then, and double the stakes."

"Done."

Again they banked for position, and this time Patsy won it; but he missed the first shot, and Studley ran twenty.

Patsy took the balls again and kept them rolling where he wanted them until he had ticked off two hundred and twelve; and by this time the spectators were standing on chairs around the table watching the wonderful play.

If Patsy's desire was to get into the lime-light, he had certainly accomplished it.

It was whispered around the room that the other game had been for two thousand dollars in gold, and that this one was for twice that sum, and soon the other tables were deserted by the players, while all sought to view this spectacular game between the two Americans.

Bets were freely made all around the table, too, by the spectators. Patsy had his admirers and Studley had his.

Frequently the great room rang with applause in recognition of some remarkable shot; and at last Patsy discovered the haughty, handsome face of Von Huysen, who had forced his way nearly to the front of the line, and was watching the play with great interest.

The game was brought to a close finally by Studley again making a wonderful run, and going out when Patsy had only three to go.

Again he produced his roll, and paid Studley in the presence of the crowd; and then he remarked laughingly:

"You're rather too much for me to-night. To-morrow night I'll beat you."

"We'll see about that," replied Studley; and they took their coats and left the room.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GERMAN SECRET AGENT.

"Here are your six thousand dollars, Patsy," said Studley, when they were in their rooms and preparing for bed.

"Keep it in your pocket, Billy. There is no telling at what minute you might need a bunch of money. Every cent of our expenses for the work will be paid, you know. I think we did a good stroke of work to-night."

"Do you? I don't see that it amounted to much save to draw a crowd around us."

"Why, man alive, we interested Von Huysen more than we could have done in any other way. I happened to know that he has a passion for billiards. I thought we would most likely find him in the billiard-room, if he was in the city. To-morrow evening when we go there he will most likely speak to one of us."

"He doesn't look like a man who scrapes acquaintances."

"And he doesn't. But his passion is billiards. He plays a good game, too."

"You wish to make his acquaintance?"

"I certainly do, if it can be accomplished by his making the first move. And this was the only way to bring that about. We'll turn in now and be ready for the campaign of to-morrow, and the succeeding nine days. One of us—both, if possible—must be present at that meeting on the fifteenth."

The following morning was like June in New York, although it was, in reality, the middle of November.

Terrence was at the door with his carriage when they issued from the house, and he drove them to the hotel for their breakfast; and as they entered the breakfast-room they discovered that Von Huysen and his companion of the preceding evening were already there.

Patsy and Studley were shown to the next table to that occupied by the German, who fixed his cold, hard eyes upon them as they entered. Evidently he recognized them as the billiard-players.

But neither of our friends paid the slightest attention to him. They were careful not to so much as glance in his direction, but kept up a rapid fire of small talk between themselves, and acting the parts of men utterly without care.

The meal was nearly finished when a waiter, not their own, approached them and laid a card upon the table beside Patsy's plate.

"The gentleman at the next table craves your acquaintance, sir," he said in Spanish. "He wishes me to say that he saw you at billiards last evening."

Patsy raised his eyebrows in surprise, picked up the card, gazed at it for a moment, put it down again, turned toward the other table, and bowed and smiled. Then he sought in his own case for a card of his own to return.

"Billy, have you got a card with you?" he asked.

"I think I have just two of my own cards left, Patsy," was the reply.

"Well, give me one. It will never be so useful as now. Gee! We're doing fine."

Studley passed it over, and Patsy, putting it with one he took from his own pocket, carrying the name he had assumed, Mr. Felix J. Garland, he gave them to the waiter; and again he half-turned in his seat and bowed and smiled.

The bow and the smile—Von Huysen's smile was with the lips, and not in the eyes—were returned in kind, and then Patsy calmly resumed his breakfast.

"I call that easy going," remarked Studley, sotto voce.

"Yes; if we can manage to keep it on the footing it's on now."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Von Huysen is probably one of the smartest secret agents in the world—and one of the smartest men, too. He sees a motive in everything that is done, and you can bet your life he is wondering right now if there is a motive behind us."

"Let me see his card."

Patsy passed it over, and Studley read in an undertone:

"'Emile William Charles von Huysen.'" Below it was written: "'Begging the honor of your acquaintance.'"

They loitered some little time longer over their meal, and then when they were about to rise, Patsy was conscious, without turning around, that Von Huysen was approaching.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said, in perfect English, and in a voice that was a fascination in itself. A wonderful voice it was, soft and rich and deep and full. The voice of a strong man and a self-reliant one. "I hope that I have not intruded upon your good nature in requesting the pleasure of an acquaintance."

"The honor is ours, sir," replied Patsy quickly. "Let me present my friend, Mr. William Studley, of New York. You are Herr Von Huysen?"

"Colonel Von Huysen, of his imperial majesty's arms; yes, sir, and very happy to make your acquaintance, Mr. Garland; and yours, Mr. Studley. Let me present my friend, the Baron De Giers. We witnessed your wonderful play at billiards last night, gentlemen."

"Indeed," laughed Patsy. "I fancy we both played rather better than we knew how, last night. Do you play, colonel?"

"Indifferently. Not as you play. Do you remain long in Buenos Ayres?"

"Until we tire of it—unless we find an investment to our tastes."

"Ah! Then you are old friends, traveling together."

"Indeed, we are."

"It isn't a new thing, then, for one of you to win a considerable sum of money from the other, I take it."

"I think," said Patsy musingly, "that we are about

even up just now. How is that, Billy?" he asked of Studley, who was walking ahead with the baron.

"What's that, Garland?"

"How do we stand on bets just now."

"I think I'm a trifle ahead; a thousand or so."

"Would you like to try a game, colonel?" asked Patsy, turning again to Von Huysen. "It is rather early in the morning—eleven o'clock, isn't it?—but they play billiards at all hours here."

"Oh, the hour's all right, but you are too strong for me, Mr. Garland."

"Then, since we are new acquaintances, I'll make it four hundred to your two hundred, and play you for dinners to-night for four."

"You are giving me too great odds now."

"Well, you have seen my game. I have not seen yours. Make the odds yourself. We will dine together this evening, anyhow; eh?"

"I will play two hundred to your three hundred, then," said Von Huysen; and so they adjourned to the billiard-room, and the game began.

It is not necessary to describe the game in detail; it was Patsy's intention to lose, but to do it by a hair, and this he succeeded in doing, having only one to go when Von Huysen ran out.

The German was anxious for another game, but Patsy looked across the room at the clock, and declined.

"Another time, colonel," he said. "I am due to call upon my banker, so if you will excuse me, we will have to go."

"Very well, Mr. Garland; but permit me, if you please. Since you are to indulge us in dinners, I hope you will consent to accompany the baron and me to the theater."

"With pleasure. And we will have the dinner after the theater; eh?"

"I think so; yes."

Terrence was awaiting them, as usual, and Patsy directed that he take them to the office of Mr. Morgan James.

"Now, Billy," he said to his friend, as soon as they were in the carriage, "the game is fairly begun. All that we have to do now is to keep an eye on Von Huysen, and know where he goes and what he does."

"That sounds easy enough, but I fancy it will be a hard one at that."

"It's a cinch that every one of the agents, when they arrive, will report to Von Huysen. If we can manage to keep fairly good tabs on him, we will be able to recognize them as they come. And there must be one among them whom we can bend to our uses."

"It would seem so."

At the bank Patsy presented his letter of credit, and made all necessary arrangements for his stay in the city. Then he engaged in some general conversation with Mr. James, and was about to withdraw when, through the window, he espied a passing carriage, in which were Von Huysen and the baron.

They were looking toward the bank-window, and saw Patsy through it; both men bowed.

"You know them, Mr. Garvan?" asked the banker.

"A chance acquaintanceship only," replied Patsy, with a shrug. "My friend and I played a game of billiards at the hotel last night, and this morning, at the breakfast-table, Von Huysen sent his card to me."

"H'm; I happen to know who both those men are, if the information would interest you."

"It certainly would."

"I take it that you are here on business, although ostensibly you are bent on pleasure."

"Your surmise is correct, sir."

"Your chief, Mr. Carter, once did me a very great favor. I have always been anxious to return it in kind, if it became possible, so I say to you now that if there is any way in which I can serve you while you are here, command me."

"That is very kind of you. Now will you tell me what you know about the colonel and the baron?"

"I happen to know that both are government spies. Von Huysen is from Germany; the other man is in the service of Austria—much the same thing; eh?"

"In a way—yes."

"They have been here already about two weeks; they arrived together, and I am of the opinion that they are awaiting the arrival of others. I might as well tell you that if I am correct, it will not be the first meeting of importance in the way of hatching conspiracies that has taken place in this city."

"No?"

"More than a year before the Russo-Japanese War began, there was just such a meeting held in this city. Those who attended it came from all parts of the world. It was thought then, you remember, that Japan would stand no show whatever against the Russian bear."

"I know."

"The entire affair was a plot hatched, just as I am convinced one is in the process of hatching now. Do you mind telling me if you are here on that business? You know you may trust me."

"Yes, sir, I know that I may trust you; but there are some matters of such vital importance that we may not disclose them even to those we trust implicitly. I have no objections to your forming your own conclusions, however."

"That is entirely satisfactory. Where are you stopping?"

Patsy told him.

"Excellent," said the banker. "Much better than at a hotel. I think I can see my way to assist you very greatly."

"Then I hope you will do so."

"Those men are here to hold a meeting of some sort. There are already five of them in the city, and, although they do not apparently know one another, I know about them."

"Five here already!" exclaimed Patsy. "Will you tell me who they are?"

"Willingly; and I will do more than that, too."

CHAPTER X.

A FIGHT IN THE HOTEL OFFICE.

"I have in my employ here, Mr. Garvan," continued the banker; "a Frenchman named Lafont. He is an old man now, but he is still the best man I ever saw in his line of business, and that is in worming out information about the people who come here to this country. You know, of course, that this is a sort of Mecca for fugitives from justice. As a banker, it becomes necessary that I should know as much as possible about the people who come here. It is Lafont's business to find out all that for me. He never comes here to the bank. I am the only official of the bank who knows of his connection with it, and hence the only man in the city who knows it, but he reports to me every day, or as often as I require it, and for the ten years he has worked for me, I have never known him to be mistaken."

"That certainly is a good recommendation."

"Shall I surprise you, Mr. Garvan?"

"If you like."

"It may hurt you—or, at least, hurt your pride somewhat."

"I will take that risk."

"Your friend, who is waiting outside in the bank, is at this moment a fugitive from justice. He robbed the——"

"One moment, Mr. James. Inasmuch as I am the man who followed him and recovered the cash, your information is not new. Neither is it quite correct. He has restored every cent of the money that was taken, and every indictment against him has been quashed. At the present moment he has my entire confidence, and he is deserving of yours. I may say, also, that he is an old-time friend of Mr. Carter's."

"You amaze me."

"I tell it to you exactly as it is."

"Then I beg his pardon and yours. But it all goes to show how thorough old Lafont is."

"It certainly does."

"Now, if you would like me to put Lafont on the scent of these fellows like Von Huysen, who are hatching some sort of a conspiracy, I will be glad to do it for you; and, believe me, he has ways and means of finding out things which you could not arrive at in years."

"I accept your offer with pleasure, Mr. James. How shall I get my reports from him?"

"Through me. Come here every day at noon."

"Then that is agreed upon. Now, will you tell me what you already know about the five men of the conspiracy who are already here?"

"You know about two of them now; the baron and the colonel. The others are——"

"Yes?"

"Two of them, one named Marriott and the other Creighton, are English spies. The remaining one, Lozier by name, is from Paris. They are all at the hotel where you played billiards last night. By the way, it was a splendid game."

"Eh? Did you see it?"

"No; Lafont did. He said he thought you were playing it for a purpose, and that he did not think the bets were genuine."

"Truly, your man is a marvel. I wish I could make his acquaintance."

"Possibly you will do so. I will tell him that you are my friends, and that in doing you a service he will serve me. He is devoted to me. Will you dine with me this evening, Mr. Garvan?"

"Thank you"—Patsy smiled broadly—"but the fact is

we are dining with Colonel Von Huysen and the baron. We are also attending the theater together."

"You are? Then depend upon it he already suspects you. Beware of that man, Garvan. He is a host unto himself, and as unscrupulous as the devil."

When Patsy and Studley left the bank they strolled down the avenue together, Terrence following along at a respectful distance behind them.

"I begin to believe, Billy, that I'm not so smart as I thought I was," said Patsy presently.

"Why so?"

"I have suddenly come to the conclusion that we haven't fooled Von Huysen a little bit, and that up to now he has fooled us a whole lot."

"Do you mean that he knows what we are here for?"

"No; not quite that; but I do mean that he is suspicious of what we might be here for. It is a part of his game, of course, to keep tabs on every stranger who has appeared in the city since his arrival, or who will appear, up to the time of that meeting. Our entry was accompanied by such a blare of trumpets, in the way of that game of billiards, that he is puzzled, but he means to satisfy himself as to who we are."

"Well, let him, if he can do it."

A surprise was awaiting Patsy when he arrived at the hotel again.

He had scarcely entered it when Von Huysen pulled himself out of a deep chair in one of the corners and came rapidly forward. His face was as expressionless as ever, his eyes as hard and cold, but he kept them carefully upon Patsy, and seemed studiously to avoid Studley.

It was an avoidance that was marked, too, and Studley flushed and turned abruptly away.

"May I have a word with you, Mr. Garland?" asked Von Huysen, although he made the question almost a demand.

"Certainly, colonel. What is it?"

"Will you step this way, where we will not be overheard. It is a delicate matter, and one that I fear will shock you."

"Really? I can't imagine——"

"Will you be seated, Mr. Garland?"

Patsy dropped into a chair. He guessed now what was coming. The banker was not the only one who had received information concerning Studley. Thus rapidly does ill news travel.

"What is it all about, colonel?" Patsy asked.

"Your friend and companion. Did I not understand you to say that you were old friends?"

"Why, yes. We met this time on the steamer, purely by accident, but—what of that? How does my friend concern you, sir?"

Von Huysen shrugged his shoulders.

"Did you come here directly from New York?" he asked.

"Yes; but I had only just returned to New York from an absence. Really, sir, I wish you would be good enough to explain this——"

"Be patient with me, please. It is a difficult matter. The fact of the matter is this: The person whom you call your friend is a fugitive from justice, and as such I must decline, for myself and the baron, to dine with or to attend the theater in his company to-night. One moment, if you please. This in no way refers to you. I am certain that you were ignorant of this matter, otherwise——"

The pause was significant.

Patsy was for a moment completely nonplused; but he decided very quickly how to act.

"I can't believe it," he exclaimed. "There must be some mistake. Your information cannot be reliable. Why, it's preposterous!"

Von Huysen shrugged his shoulders again, and he could be very expressive with his shoulders.

"There is no mistake," he said. "The information is correct. I must ask you to pardon me for referring to it at all, but I considered it my duty to you as well as to myself. I will leave it to your own good judgment, sir, to find some manner in which to get rid of him; or if you prefer his company——"

Again that significant pause, this time accompanied by as significant a smile. Patsy felt like striking him in the face.

Suddenly Patsy started to his feet.

"Do me the kindness to wait here a moment for me, colonel," he said; and before the latter could reply, he hurried away after Studley.

"Billy," he said, "we are up against it hard this time. I've got some rotten bad news for you, and I want your advice about it. Can you stand a blow in the solar plexis?"

"I think so, Patsy. I can guess what it is. I shouldn't have appeared here under my own name. I should have changed mine even as you did."

"Well, it's too late to say that now. 'Ifs' don't count."

"Was that what Von Huysen wanted to speak with you about? Has information about me got here already from New York?"

"Yes. Possibly Von Huysen has been using the cable—who can tell?"

"What does he say about it?"

"He says that you are a fugitive from justice, and that he must decline to sit with you at table or at the theater to-night."

"And what did you say, Patsy?"

"I said I didn't believe a word of it, that is was preposterous, and all that. He had me paralyzed for a minute, and I didn't know what to say."

"Where is he now?"

"I left him over there in the corner where we were talking."

"Dueling is permitted in this country, isn't it?"

"It is winked at; but what are you thinking of? Von Huysen is one of the best swordsmen and pistol-shots in the universe."

"So am I. Go back to him, Patsy, and say that your friend denies absolutely the charges he has made—and keep your eyes open for what may happen. Billy Studley is himself again right now. I think I am the equal of Colonel Von Huysen in any game he wishes to play. Wait, I will return with you."

They turned together and started across the room to the place where Patsy had left Von Huysen. He saw them approaching, and rose from his chair, standing straight as an arrow, and with a supercilious sneer on his handsome face.

Ignoring Studley utterly, he bowed mockingly to Patsy, and, with a perceptible sneer, said:

"I see that you have made your choice, Mr. Garland. Permit me to withdraw."

He was turning away, when the cold, clear voice of Studley arrested him, in spite of himself.

"One moment, Colonel Von Huysen," he said; and the German stopped still. Then he half-turned, and with inimitable insolence, he said:

"If you address a remark to me again, sir, I shall chastise you."

Instantly there was a swishing sound through the air, followed by a loud slap, for, with all the strength of his right arm, Studley had slapped Von Huysen across the face with the gloves he held in his hand; and the instant he delivered the blow, he stood tall and straight before the German, calm, cool, and as relentless as the reputation of his present foe.

Von Huysen fell back a pace. His face became pallid, and then turned fiery red where the gloves had struck him.

For a moment it seemed as if he was about to leap upon Studley, and that there would be a rough-and-tumble fight right there; but he controlled himself admirably, and by a supreme effort started to turn away a second time.

"Are you a coward as well as a card-sharper?" demanded Studley fiercely. "You were cashiered from the German Army for cheating at cards, you cur! I know you. I was at college at Heidelberg when it happened, Captain Huysen, without the Von."

It is impossible to depict the sting with which Studley uttered those remarks, and they were like a whiplash in the face of the man to whom he addressed them.

With a cry of rage, Von Huysen turned and sprang straight at Studley, but the latter leaped nimbly to one side, swung his left arm around, and delivered a blow with his fist against the colonel's jaw, which sent him sprawling to the floor, half-stunned.

Then, before others could interfere, Studley stepped close to him and said:

"If you want any further satisfaction, you know how to get it; but you're too great a coward to fight unless you can shoot your adversary in the back."

CHAPTER XI.

THE CHALLENGE.

"I guess we're in the limelight, all right, all right," said Patsy, when they had seated themselves to await developments.

Many people had rushed forward to interfere in the combat after it was over; two or three had assisted Von Huysen to his feet, and he was now surrounded by a group of his particular admirers, at the opposite end of the great room.

Patsy was regarding those men carefully, for he had not a doubt that among them were the two Englishmen and the other Frenchman, of whom the banker had told him.

He fancied, too, as he sat there watching them, that he could pick out each one, almost by name, and he thought

he saw in the man Creighton a face that was not entirely strange to him.

However, he gave it little heed at the moment; not, indeed, until that very individual came across the room toward him, accompanied by the baron.

Then he knew him; recognized him as an English detective named Watson, who had at one time been employed on the Boston police force—and he knew that Watson would recognize him also. Knew, in fact, that he had doubtless already done so, and had told Von Huysen who he was, which would account for the German's eagerness to make the acquaintance, and also for his subsequent behavior.

But if Creighton—as he called himself now—did recognize Patsy, he gave no sign of it, and Patsy was as careful to appear ignorant of his identity. It was the baron who did the talking.

He addressed himself directly to Patsy, and said:

"I suppose, Mr. Garland, that you will represent your friend? No?"

"If he needs any representation, I shall be delighted to serve him," was the coldly spoken reply.

"Very good, sir. My friend, Colonel Van Huysen, quite naturally demands satisfaction for the outrage that has just been committed upon him——"

"Pardon me, baron," Patsy interrupted him. "In discussing this matter with me, you will be good enough to confine your language to the proper methods of expression. Proceed, sir."

"Excuse me. My friend feels aggrieved because of the unfortunate circumstances that have just happened. He demands satisfaction, or an apology."

"There will be no apology, baron, unless your principal chooses to make one."

"In that case he demands a meeting; and you"—the baron bowed again—"as the challenged party, of course, have the choice of weapons."

"What shall it be, Billy?" asked Patsy lightly, turning to Studley, who was lighting a cigar.

"Rapiers—if there are any in the city."

"Rapiers, baron, if any are procurable; if not, the nearest we can come to them."

"I have an excellent pair with me that have seen service, if you will condescend to make use of them."

"I think we may do that. By the way, baron; you—er—friend here, who seems to be interested in our talk? Who is he?"

"I *beg* your pardon. It was most forgetful of me. Mr. Garland, Mr. Creighton. Really, I had forgotten that you had not met. You think, then, that my rapiers will answer?"

"I think so. We will make an effort to procure a pair ourselves, to bring to the field, and if we succeed we will permit the gentlemen to select their own——"

"Provided that they are of the same length and weight."

"Assuredly."

"And now, sir, as to the time and place of meeting, have you any suggestions to make?"

"None save that it should be accomplished as soon as possible."

"I quite agree with you there. My principal is also anxious to have the meeting at once. Shall we say, then, to-morrow morning at daybreak, between dawn and sunrise?"

"That will be satisfactory."

"And the place?"

"I am such a stranger here that I could not even suggest one."

"Will you trust to me to select a place, and will you submit yourselves to the guidance of a friend of mine whom I will send to you to take you there? You see, sir, that we must be very circumspect about affairs of this kind. They are, of course, against the law, but if conducted properly, are winked at. If you will put yourselves in my hands—in the hands of the Baron De Giers, I pledge you, sirs, that all will be well."

"Right willingly, baron," said Patsy. "Your friend, who will guide us—who is he? Not Monsieur Creighton?"

"No; a countryman of mine; Monsieur Lozier, by name. He will call for you, if you will give me your address, at five in the morning. That will afford time to get to the field."

"Very good, sir. If you will present me to Monsieur Lozier now, I will inform him of the address. One moment, baron, if you please. Who will provide the doctor?"

"I will attend to that, with your permission."

"Thank you; and now, how many witnesses does your side propose to take to the field?"

"Truly, I had not thought of that. There will be—why, we will have Lozier as well as myself, won't we?"

"Yes; and also the doctor."

"The doctor will, of course, be neutral."

Patsy shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, well, of course," he said. "Let it go at that, but it may be that I shall want an assistant to second me. You will not object to that under the circumstances?"

"Certainly not; although——"

"Yes?"

"It will be well to keep the matter as quiet as possible. If you could trust to my honor, Mr. Garland"—he bowed low again—"I will serve as your witness as well as for my principal."

"I think we can do that, baron. We will be ready for Monsieur Lozier when he makes his appearance in the morning. And now if you will be good enough to present me to him——?"

"Monsieur Creighton," said the baron, "will you be good enough to request the presence of Monsieur Lozier?"

Creighton departed, and returned a moment later accompanied by a small, fussy Frenchman, with eyes like beads, and the manners of a dancing-master.

The presentations were made, the meeting for the morning arranged, and then the two parties separated.

"Well, Billy, what do you think about it?" asked Patsy, dropping down beside him.

"I am wondering whether I shall kill Von Huysen, or only put him out of business for a while," was the cool reply.

"Are you really as expert with rapiers as all that?" asked Patsy incredulously.

"I am, Patsy; neither do I underrate the accomplishments of Von Huysen, who is counted one of the best swordsmen in Europe. He will be delighted when he learns of my choice of weapons. He will think he has an easy mark; but I'll fool him, Patsy. There is one thing that I don't like about it, however."

"What is that?"

"They are going to have too many men at the field, or we are not going to have enough. I don't trust Von Huysen a little bit. The baron seems to be all right, but one never can tell; and as for that fellow Creighton—there are snakes in his eyes."

"Oh, I know Creighton of old. I had the pleasure of knocking him down once. He remembers me, too, although he chose not to do so to-day. But he's a scoundrel, all right."

"Well, even the doctor may be their friend, or even one of their number; one of the spies, you know. Then, if Creighton tags along somewhere, it will make five to our two. I don't like that part of it. It looks to me as if they did not intend that either of us should return from that dueling-field alive."

"By Jove, Billy! I wonder if they have hatched up a scheme to get rid of us?"

"That is about the size of the impression I have got at the present moment, Patsy."

While they were talking an old man had lounged toward them, and dropped into a near-by chair, and now, as Patsy happened to glance toward him, he dropped a pencil, with which he had been tapping idly upon the arm of his chair.

As Patsy went forward to pick it up for him, their heads came quite close together, and the old man whispered quickly:

"I must speak to you. Follow me when you see me pass out at the door."

Patsy was surprised, but he did not show it. A moment later he said to Studley:

"I am going outside for a few minutes, and I want you to promise me that you will remain right here in this seat till I return."

"All right. What's up?"

"I don't know yet, but I suspect. Watch that group over there, and if, when I go out, one of them detaches himself to follow me, remember which one, will you?"

"Yes."

The old man was already on his feet. He lingered around the corridor a few minutes, and presently faded out of sight through one of the rear doors—a door which led to the café and bar.

Patsy lost no time in following, and he did it boldly, because the old man had done it so deftly. Their enemies would suppose that he was going after a drink.

He was passing along the narrow corridor toward the bar, when from a door at one side a hand reached out and grasped him.

"Come this way," said the old man, for it was he; and he led Patsy along another and yet narrower hall until they entered a small, windowless room, where there was a light burning.

"I am Lafont," he said simply. "Mr. James directed me to look after you and your friend."

"I suspected that you were Lafont. I am very glad to make your acquaintance."

"I knew Mr. Carter once, many years ago," continued the old man. "I served him for a little time in Paris, on a smuggling-case he had there. I have always respected him, and now I am glad to be of service to one of his friends."

"Thank you."

"I witnessed the whole scene there in the hotel office. Part of it was a delight to me. Part of it has given me great uneasiness."

"Why so?"

"Because, my dear sir, you will have no witnesses on the field. Those men do not expect that either of you gentlemen shall leave the dueling-ground alive. They intend to fall upon and murder you, either before the actual duel commences, or the moment it is over. Of course, they expect Von Huysen to kill your friend."

"They may be mistaken in that respect. My friend is a master of fence."

"Then tell him to strike for Von Huysen's throat. He wears a steel shirt under his underclothing. I know whereof I speak. But even then, if Von Huysen is struck down, the others intend to fall upon you, too, just the same, and kill you. They know who you are and why you are here. How they have discovered it I cannot say; but know it they do."

"Well, what shall we do, Lafont?"

"If you will be content to leave it all to me, sir, and go to the ground just as if you had all the confidence in the world in them, I think I can find a way to checkmate their plots."

"And will you do it, Lafont?"

"I will, sir."

"Then it shall be as you say entirely; and I thank you."

CHAPTER XII.

THE DUEL IN THE WOODS.

It was yet dark when Monsieur Lozier arrived at the rooms where Patsy and Studley were staying, to guide them to the dueling-field; but they were ready for him, and had, in fact, been waiting almost half an hour when he arrived.

His little pig-eyes glittered like a snake's, and he came briskly forward across the pavement to greet them, which he did by bowing low.

"I haf arrive," he said in imperfect English, although Patsy was assured that he could speak it perfectly. "It will be one fine forning for ze—what you call him—sword-play; no? I haf ze carriage at your disposal, messieurs."

"Thank you," said Patsy coldly. "We will ride in our own conveyance. If you will lead the way, my coachman will follow you."

"*Mais oui*, monsieur. As you decide."

Patsy had a pair of most beautiful rapiers which Lafont had provided for him. They were carefully wrapped in flannel to keep the damp from them, and Patsy laid them on the seat in front of him when they took their seats in the carriage.

In his two pockets he carried two revolvers, and he had provided Terrence, the driver, with two more. He had also taken Terrence into his confidence about the proceeding of the morning, as well as in regard to what had happened inside the hotel during the evening. At the close of his talk with Terrence, he had said to him:

"Now, Terrence, I have reason to expect that there will be some sort of a scrap out there at the dueling-ground that is not down on the cards. It may be that we will encounter a touch of real old-fashioned rough-house before we are out of this. I want you to have your Irish with you in case anything happens."

"I will that, sor."

"Your own judgment will tell you whether to mix in or not; but I want you to station the carriage so that you can see all that goes on. If you cannot see it from the box, tie your horses and come nearer."

"I'll manage to see it all, sor."

The ride out was mostly in silence, for both men were thinking. Patsy was wondering if Studley had not, perhaps, overestimated his own powers, and Studley was deploring the fact that his reputation—the one he was trying to down—should have traveled so swiftly after him.

The ride was a long one; much longer than either of them had anticipated, and Patsy began to understand why it had been necessary that they should have a guide; he also understood that it was a part of the plans of the conspirators to get them as far away from the limits of the city as possible, in order that there might be less chance of interruption—at the end.

But they did arrive at the dueling-ground at last. Terrence told him that they were a little more than

twelve miles from the city limits, and in an unfrequented part of the country.

"Sure," he said, "ye might have fought within a stone's throw of the city, and nobody would have bothered you, if you'd been quiet about it."

They found Von Huysen and the baron already on the spot, and there was another man, who was introduced as "Doctor Marriott." Patsy recognized the fact at once that he was one of the conspirators.

"Where is Monsieur Creighton?" he asked of the baron, with some irony in his voice.

"Ah, we did not think it wise to bring too many, monsieur," replied the baron. "I see that you were successful in discovering a pair of rapiers. Shall we examine yours and mine to discover if there is any choice? Pardieu! They are the same, precisely. Same make. It is well, monsieur. There are four just alike. Shall it be your pair or mine?"

"Yours, baron, since you were the first to offer them. I brought these for an emergency; in case one should be broken, you know."

In the meantime the principals had been stripping off coats, vests, and collars, and they now stood waiting for their seconds to call them to time.

It is not necessary to describe all the useless and ceremonial preliminaries to such a duel. Suffice it to say that the sun was not yet up when Studley and Von Huysen stood face to face, ready for the encounter.

"Ready!" called Patsy. "On guard! Attack!"

Von Huysen only needed the word to begin a fierce attack. It was plain that he had supposed it would be mere child's play for him to overcome the American, and he rushed upon him with a fury that made a shield of steel all around him; a shield that had ugly points darting in and out, everywhere, and always seeking the life-blood of Billy Studley.

But Studley handled his sword as if it were a feather. For every thrust, or lunge, or tierce made by Von Huysen, there was a guard to meet it, and the German's weapon was neatly turned aside at every effort he made.

At first the spy seemed surprised; then he looked worried, and presently he became anxious. He was good swordsman enough to know already that he had met his master, and that thus far the American was only playing with him.

Until that anxious look appeared on Von Huysen's face, Studley had been content to fight on the defensive; but now, when Von Huysen began to give ground a little, as if he were looking for some opening that was not down in the code, he pressed forward to the attack.

His point drank blood from the German's forearm; it ripped a slit in the shoulder of his shirt, and stained it red from the scratched skin underneath; it played around the German's head like points of flame, and then, just as Von Huysen shouted out a cry, that was evidently a signal, and at the same time leaped backward, Studley followed him with a quick spring, and plunged the point of his rapier through the German's cheek, laying it open to the bone, and causing him to utter a startled oath of mingled rage and pain; and then, while Von Huysen started back, Studley plunged his point straight at Von Huysen's heart, knowing as he did that it would be stopped by the steel shirt the man wore.

"You cur!" he cried out to Von Huysen. "You come to a duel with a shirt of mail underneath your own."

"Get back here, Billy, quick!" Patsy called out to him. "We're surrounded, old chap. It's a fight for our lives now."

It certainly looked that way. It was evident that Von Huysen's cry had meant something, for, as Studley leaped backward to a place beside Patsy, he saw five men rush out from among the trees and come running toward them, each armed with a sword.

Patsy took in the whole scene at a glance. He saw Von Huysen struggling with the "doctor," who was trying to bind a handkerchief around his wounded face; saw him thrust Marriott aside, seize his sword, and rush again toward Studley, wounded though he was; he saw the baron rip a slender weapon out of his cane, and also move forward; he saw five men, one of whom was Creighton, rushing toward them from the trees, and he knew then for a certainty that these men had deliberately come out there to murder Studley and himself, believing that afterward they could attribute it all to a double duel—and he saw Terrence O'Toole advancing toward them brandishing the stock of his whip, much as he would have done with a good old Irish shillalah.

"It's nine to three, Patsy," said Studley, also taking in the scene at a glance.

"Terrence and I could clean them all out with our guns," replied Patsy; "but I won't have them used till the last minute—not unless it's necessary. They won't dare to use guns, for they couldn't explain this business if they did; and they think we haven't got any. Ready! On guard! We'll fight them this way for a bit. I am relying upon Lafont."

Patsy had seized one of the rapiers he brought out with him. He tossed the other one to the Irishman.

"Do you know how to use it, Terrence?" he asked.

"You bet I do; as well as any av thim."

It was little, pig-eyed Lozier who first attacked Patsy, but the instant he made the attack Patsy ran him through the fleshy part of the shoulder, and the small Frenchman fell back, fainting.

Behind him came the baron, as cool as ever, and as implacable, Patsy could see; and back of him were two others, who now took occasion to run around toward the side in order to take the young detective in the flank.

And Studley was beset in the same manner, for the big German came tearing down upon him like a thunderbolt, followed by three of his retainers.

Such an unequal combat as that could not last a moment. Patsy saw that instantly, and, reversing his weapon, he flung it as one would a spear, straight at the baron.

It caught him straight between the eyes, and he went down like a stricken bullock; and then Patsy leaped backward and reached for his pistols.

"Guns, Terrence!" he called out, "but don't shoot unless I do."

Studley had also reversed his rapier and thrown it at Von Huysen, knocking him senseless, and then he had leaped back to Patsy's side.

The others of the attacking-party were still rushing forward, and then, just as Patsy had one pistol half-drawn, just as Terrence got one of his out ready for use, there came a shout from among the trees, and a squad of mounted soldiers dashed out upon the scene of the combat.

"What is the meaning of this scene?" demanded the officer in charge, and, alas! the baron, whose ready tongue might have offered some explanation, was still insensible. The others hung their heads in shame and looked vainly around for a chance to escape.

"I think, señor capitan," said Patsy in Spanish, "the scene explains itself. We are but two! three with the assistance of my coachman. We came out here to indulge in a gentlemanly combat with swords, but when my principal got something the best of it, lo! these bullies rushed out from among the trees and attacked us. That hound there"—he pointed to where Von Huysen was struggling to rise from the ground—"was the other principal. If you will strip him of his shirt, you will find that he wears a coat of mail under it."

For reply, the young officer strode over to Von Huysen and, seizing him by the collar of his shirt, ripped it away from him, thus disclosing the fact that Patsy had spoken the truth. He turned to his soldiers.

"Sergeant," he said, "take those men, every one of them, to prison—incommunicado, until I have inquired into this." He turned again to Patsy, and added: "Señor, you and your friend may depart in peace."

"I thank you, captain," said Patsy. "Accept my regrets that such a scene as this should have occurred."

"It is nothing, señor. I am glad that I arrived in time. You will not care to press a charge against those men?"

"Certainly not. The least said about it the better."

"In that case they will not be taken to prison. They will be escorted under guard to a steamer which sails from this port at noon. It is better that as little should be known of this affair as possible."

"You are right, captain. I thank you again."

"And if you will excuse me I will ride after my men, who are now escorting the carriages that brought those cutthroats here."

He rode away, and Studley and Patsy followed Terrence to their carriage.

"Well, what do you think of that for an outcome of our international case?" exclaimed Studley, as they took their seats in the carriage.

"Rather a fiasco, wasn't it, Billy? Well, anyhow, they won't hold their meeting on the fifteenth. I think we have broken up the conspiracy a great deal better than though we had waited for the meeting."

Half a mile along the road toward the city they were stopped by an old man on horseback. It was Lafont, of course, and he rode beside them for some distance.

"The man you called 'captain' is the chief of police—a very dear friend of mine," he explained. "I told him the tale, and he agreed to escort those men out of the country, with as little noise as possible. My felicitations, señors;" and he turned and galloped away.

When Patsy arrived back in the city, he sent the following cable to Conner:

"Conspiracy busted. Conspirators scattered. Play is over. Particulars by letter. PATSY."

THE END.

The next number (581) will be "Plotters Against a Nation; or, The Mystery of a Perfumed Handkerchief."

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TALKS WITH OUR READERS.

While it is true that many of the richest gold and silver-mines in the world have been discovered by men who were out searching for the precious metals, it is equally true that others have been favored by fortune rather than by forethought. The rise and fall of "Coal-oil Johnny," of a generation ago, well illustrates the money-craze that swept through the land of the oil-fields till a great corporation took control of the petroleum finds and eliminated the element of chance from the discoveries and the output. Bret Harte, in his dramatic poem, "Dow's Flats," tells of a man who had been in very hard luck, who started to dig for water, the "derringer hid in his breast," to be used if he failed; but, instead of finding what he was after, he struck pay-dirt and a fortune.

In 1867, Donald Ross, a young Scotch sailor, deserted his ship in San Francisco, and with two companions, green as himself, started for the new placers in the Sierras at the head of Kern River. Failing in their first efforts, the three men crossed through the Lehatchepah Pass and entered the volcano-rutted Mohave Desert. Like many before them, they reasoned that a region so worthless and lifeless must have in it the promise of gold. Again they failed, and after some trials made their way into Arizona and on to the headwaters of the Little Colorado. Here they had fair success, but the appearance of Cochin and his dreaded Apaches forced all the white men in that region to abandon their claims and fly to Zuni or the far-off army-posts for protection. Ross and his friends succeeded in reaching Fort Whipple, from which point Colonel Gregg, then in command of the Eighth Cavalry, sent them back to Hardyville, on the Great Colorado. At Hardyville the men bartered their dust for supplies, and, learning that Owen's Lake, to the west of the Sierras, was a new and promising gold-field, they determined to try their luck there. With a mule to carry their supplies, but without compass, map, or trail to guide them, they started across the 200 miles of desert to the north and west.

In their futile search for water, the adventurers were deluded by the mirages of that region, and so wandered into the blistering arroyos along the southern rim of Death Valley. Two days after Ross and his friends entered these waterless depths the mule died, and his burden was abandoned. The next day one of the men died; the other, thirst-crazed, fled farther into the desert and was never heard of again. Any position more desperate than that in which Ross now found himself it would be hard to imagine, but he had not reason enough left to realize it. As crazed as the men who had left him, the poor fellow wandered aimlessly on till all consciousness was gone. When Ross came to he found himself in the camp of a band of Pah Utes, to the south of Owen's Lake. After many days, and when the young Scotchman was able to walk, an Indian guided him to the Sierra Divide, and, pointing down to the emerald expanse of the great San Joaquin Valley and the flashing waters of Tulare Lake, he said: "White man's land."

About an hour after leaving the Indian, Ross found himself in the bed of a rock-banked stream that had its source in the snow peaks to the north. He was hurrying down through the icy waters when suddenly he came to a stop and pressed his hands to his eyes, with the dread that the wild gold-dreams of the desert were again mastering his reason. Half the sand at his feet appeared to be gold.

With proof of his find in his pockets, Ross made his way to San Francisco, where he soon interested capitalists in his discovery. Within two months he had sold out his interests for $250,000. It is said that he got back to Glasgow some weeks before the return of the tramp steamer from which he had deserted.

Since the French privateer and smuggler Jean Lafitte sailed the high seas and brought his treasures to the Gulf coast and buried them, now and then it happens that some sensation arises as to their immediate whereabouts.

Thirty-four years ago the pirate of the gulf, as Lafitte was called, appeared in a dream to Doctor Beazly, and rather roughly taking him by the collar told him to come with him and he would show him where there were gold and silver and diamonds buried. The doctor, in his dream, followed his midnight visitor, and he directed him to a certain place in the cottage which was then the Beazly home and occupied by the family, and designated the spot under which lies the much-talked-of wealth of the privateer.

The doctor, having the same dream repeated twice in the same night, became wide-awake after Lafitte's third visit, and, much interested; the result being that he did, and perhaps, too, very shortly afterward, begin digging under the house in pursuit of the treasure.

After getting to the depth of four or five feet, he found nothing of any moment, except a very unusual stone in this part of the world, where nothing of its kind was ever seen here.

Had he kept on, possibly the treasure might have been found, and the restless spirit of Lafitte, wherever it may be, might have been released from this burden of secrecy, a burden from which, seemingly, he wished to be relieved, as another visit has been made in the same house, and this

time in a dream Lafitte appears in the presence of a lady, urging her to get the lost jewels, gold, and silver.

After all these years Doctor Beazly has at last consented to have some one else who believes in the undertaking join him to find the treasures, and they have made arrangements satisfactory to all parties concerned, and now in a short time Mr. McKay, a banker, being the associate mentioned, will begin operations to find the treasures stowed deep down under the old house.

Tampa, Florida, used to boast of a colored citizen, who had no more fear of an alligator than he had of the harmless lizard, and would attempt to ride one any day for a small sum of money.

His method of riding the reptile was to enter a lake or pond where the species congregated, select a large one, jump on its back quickly, and, pressing his thumbs on its eyes, urge it shoreward.

He often mounted old bulls in the lakes of Hernando County and rode them ashore without any trouble by simply pressing his thumbs on their eyes, and urging them forward with his heels or shouts.

He found it far easier to mount than dismount, for as soon as his saurian steed touched the shore it tried to seize his leg by bringing its head and tail suddenly together, and rolling over and over like a barrel going down-hill. This is the ordinary method employed by alligators for capturing their prey or enemies, and, as its efficacy depends on the prompt conjunction of jaws and tail, the stroke may be readily avoided by a little "figuring."

All he had to do when in want of an aquatic mustang was to enter a half-dried pond, pick out the largest and laziest saurian he saw there, mount it promptly, and turn its head landward. The mounted animal, according to his statement, makes no fuss about moving wherever it is directed while in the water, but the moment it touches land it uses every effort to throw and devour its jockey.

It is possible to ride an alligator some distance over land by tying its muzzle, as it does not attempt to do any injury until it can throw its open mouth and long tail together by a sudden sweep to one side.

THE FATE OF A SHIRK.

BY GUY DECKER.

As we drew near the cold latitude of Cape Horn, in the good ship *Merrimac*, several of the foremost hands complained of rheumatism in the back, the knee-joints, and other parts of the body. They declared that they found it very painful going aloft, pulling upon ropes, furling sails, and attending to other nautical duties. They must have a little rest, they said, so that they might cure themselves, or the skipper would lose their services altogether.

"Why, cork me!" exclaimed our doughty little captain one morning, when they complained to him. "You can eat your allowance, can't ye? And ye can sleep, I s'pose? And you've got clear consciences, I hope? And you're big enough not to be imposed upon, ain't ye? And you're so fat you can't hardly see out of your eyes—and—and—why, blast ye for a set of lubbers! go forward, and mind your eye and tumble up smart when ye are called, if you don't want to get a taste of a rope's end!"

And as he spoke, his little head, almost as small and quite as hard as a door-knob, seemed fairly to swell with ire, while his round eyes twinkled through his bushy brows like fireflies in the grass.

The complainants hung their heads, looking very doleful, and limped forward at a melancholy pace.

"None of that!" shrieked Captain Quirk, picking up a handspike. "Jist you hurry up your traps, and jump, or you'll get this alongside of your heads!"

And the men did jump—faster than they had ever been known to jump before, for, in reality, nothing was the matter with them.

They wished to have an easy time "going round the Horn." They did not fancy furling sails, pulling ropes, etc., in cold, disagreeable weather, and were willing that their poor shipmates should do their work for them—"that was all."

No wonder, then, that Captain Quirk was angry; no wonder that the rest of the men were similarly affected when they saw the three "shirks" hop forward with such celerity, thus showing the deception they had been practising.

"Cob 'em!" was the cry heard on all sides, and whang! whang! whang! sounded an old rusty hand-saw as it was vigorously applied to the backs of the loafers by their rough shipmates.

Now, then, the complainants showed fight; but they were held firmly while the old tar with the hand-saw continued to shower his blows.

He inflicted about fifty, when the three shirks were released.

With fierce cries, they precipitated themselves upon the old sailor. He was shaped like a bunch of tough ropes knotted together, and almost as active now as he was in youth; so he knocked one of his assailants down with a single blow. The others, however, threw him down and clutched his throat, and before they could be interfered with they had squeezed the poor old fellow's windpipe so that he could scarcely catch his breath.

He rose gasping and very angry; nevertheless, he would not permit his shipmates to punish those who had assaulted him.

"Let them face me, one after the other," he said, rolling up his sleeves, "and I'll give 'em their desarts myself."

"No!" shrieked little Captain Quirk. "I'll fight 'em, although I'm skipper of this craft!"

"No, no!" cried the first mate, now coming forward. "There's been fighting enough in the craft for one day, and I trust that those three chaps will know enough hereafter to attend to their duties like men."

Two of the shirks declared their willingness to do so; but the third, Tom Capsheaf by name, being of a more obstinate disposition, said that he would sooner die than ever pull another rope in the ship.

"This is mutiny," said the mate. "Be careful!"

"Well, then," answered the man sullenly, "I'm ready to turn to; but I won't promise to pull my 'pound,' I can assure you."

"We'll see about that!" cried the captain. "I shall hereafter have an eye upon you, and if I catch you 'sogering' I'll make you suffer for it."

At that moment a squall struck the ship, and over she went upon her beam-ends, everything cracking.

Topsails were already close-reefed, so the captain merely ordered the jib hauled down and the foresail furled.

Tom stationed himself at the end of the jib downhaul, and did not pull with more force than an infant might have done. This was noticed by the skipper; but before he could say a word a roll of the ship caused the men in front of the shirk to let go of the rope, when the end of the downhaul, suddenly whipping upward, caught around Capsheaf's throat, jerking him into the bow.

A cracking sound was heard as this took place, and the shirk fell upon the deck, quite dead, with his neck twisted in a singular manner.

When the body was launched overboard there was, I must acknowledge, but little mourning for the unfortunate man.

A PRAIRIE EDITOR.

BY AUGUSTUS WATTERS.

Many a time, as I enter the magnificent establishments of our New York dailies, the modest domicile of a young editor located for many years on an Illinois prairie arises before me, and creates that profound impression which sharpness of contrast inevitably produces. Instead of a magnificent Hoe press, turning out ten sheets at a revolution, or a Bullock press, which prints ten thousand perfect copies in an hour; composing-rooms containing an army of typos, and those marvelous "turtles," that roll about as instinct with life; editorial, stereotype, press, and counting-rooms, in which legions of employees ply their various branches—the editor I speak of was his own compositor, pressman, reporter, bookkeeper, and mail-agent. The press had been conveyed all the way from Ann Street, New York, to the prairie alluded to, and was scarcely any way in advance of the antediluvian machine on which Benjamin Franklin was fain to operate. The "stands" were home-made, and the building which sheltered them was one of those quaint adobe establishments which are still to be seen in certain portions of the West.

The town, when the editor first appeared, was little more than a solitary, rambling street, fringed with wooden residences and stores, with an extremely shabby court-house at one end, and a bridge leading over a canal at the other. Half a mile from the center of the village flowed the Illinois River, which in summer furnished a goodly supply of fish, and in winter of delicious ducks. And oftentimes, in the midst of the heterogenous mass observable in the printer's sanctum, a collection of prairie-hens and wild ducks might be seen in alarming juxtaposition with a keg of ink, a lye-pot, and the manuscript editorials for the coming week.

But the impression produced upon the mind of the writer by the scene presented on the night when he first entered the *Yeoman* office will never be erased. An exceedingly scrawny young "sucker" was officiating as devil, and manipulating the roller of the press, while the editor, with long hair and sleeves rolled up to the elbows, dexterously ran off the snowy sheets. But the most striking and unique feature of the scene was an immense skull perched upon the top of the iron frame of the press, and into an eye-hole of which a tallow candle had been thrust.

A short time previously a number of Indian skeletons had been exhumed in digging the foundation of a house, and the editor had been happily presented at one and the same time with an item and a curiosity. And thus, by the strange whirling of time, had the head-piece of "Lo! the poor Indian" been transformed from a destroyer of buffalos and fellow savages into an assistant of that mighty engine, the modern press.

As the Western Franklin rattled off the slim but lively edition of his paper, a steady fire of witticisms kept pace with the regular flap of the tympan-sheet, and if a Yankee Boswell had been present in those days, many a good thing that has long rested in oblivion might still be serving its term in the columns of the modern paragraphist. Such concentrativeness has been rarely equaled as that displayed by this angular man, and though he arrived in Morris on the verge of winter, incumbered with an almost helpless wife, and with barely enough material to fulfil the requirements of a newspaper-office, scarcely two years elapsed before he had built himself a house, established a reputation as one of the most brilliant and fearless of writers, and was regarded by the farmers and hard-handed toilers generally as one of the most promising of Western men.

The only communication the village then held with the outer world was by stage-coach and canal, and the arrival in town of what was known as the "packet," a fast-sailing canal-boat, was regarded with as much concern as New York would note the heaviest European steamer. In fact, this and the weekly issue of the *Yeoman* were the two great social events of the place, and furnished inexhaustible themes for comment, from the awe-inspiring justice of the peace to the poor widow who lived in a log cabin and supported herself by her pig and a potato-patch.

Alike when the blistering sun of summer glared upon the prairies, or the tempests of winter howled like ravening beasts, the editor continued to ply his multifarious callings. Morn, noon, and night he was engaged in reading, writing, or type-setting, and often, when the rough denizens of the Western town were locked in sleep, the grim disciple of Faust relieved the more practical labors of the day with a tune upon his flute, or a draft from the immortal founts of Shakespeare, Burns, or Byron. Many a wild prank, too, did he perpetrate, both in and out of the editorial columns, whose memory still lingers among the "oldest inhabitants." Occasionally a tramp-printer would make his appearance in the settlement, and during his few days' sojourn in the printing-office enough incipient romances would be set afloat to have stocked a dime-novelist for years. According to the "jour's" story, there was no village between the Arctic circle and the Straits of Magellan in which he had not exercised his indefatigable "stick," or an Indian settlement that was not already provided with billiard-rooms and thriving journals. In fact, the moment his tongue became loosened, and his "rule" fairly clicking away, it seemed to become a matter of perfect indifference what sort of statements he made, so long as his audience appeared to be absorbed. The latter consisted of the smiling editor, the red-headed apprentice, and perchance a trio of the open-mouthed villagers, who occasionally strayed in to see "that ere iron thing print newspapers."

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